

Writing Effective Questions

The types of questions you ask depend on the kinds of answers you need. An interesting problem usually requires more than one type of information to understand. That means, you will need to ask more than one type of question. This page explains various kinds of research questions and gives examples.

Fact Questions

Fact questions always have a correct answer and usually start with words like:

- Who...?
- What...?
- Where...?
- When...?

Some examples of memory or fact questions are:

- Who invented the calendar?
- What is copyright?
- Where is Kazakhstan?

Convergent (Why) Questions

Convergent questions require more explanation than memory or fact questions but usually have correct answers. They often start with words like:

- Why...?
- How...?
- According to...?

Some examples of convergent, or why, questions are:

- Why do we have copyright laws?
- How is a PC different from a Mac?
- According to most scientists, what is the most likely impact of greenhouse gases?

Divergent (Idea) Questions

Divergent questions usually have many acceptable answers and often include words like:

- What if...?
- How could...?
- How would...?

Some examples of divergent, or idea, questions are:

- What would your life be like if you lived in another country?
- How could greenhouse gases affect the weather where you live?
- How would research be different if copyright laws did not exist?

Evaluative (Opinion) Questions

Evaluative questions require judgment to decide among various opinions or answers. They often include words like:

- Do you think...?
- Why should...?
- How well...?

Some examples of evaluative or opinion questions are:

- Do you think downloading music and graphics from the Internet is always OK?
- Why should educational use of copyrighted materials have different rules than commercial use?
- How well did the text support the author's point of view?