

Identifying a Research Question with Significance

Once you've identified a **narrow topic** for your research (see [our example](#) of this process), you can make your project stronger by:

1. Articulating a question your research will try to answer (**research question**) and
2. Identifying what someone could learn from reading your paper (**motivation or argument**).

Read the three example columns below, and then fill in the blanks for your own topic.

I am studying... (Narrowed Topic)	...because I want to find out... (Research Question)	...so that readers understand... (Motivation or Argument)
Differences in Boston-based and Philadelphia-based abolitionist rhetoric...	...why Boston-based abolitionists emphasized broad themes of social justice...	...how previous scholars may have overlooked the role of free black Bostonians in shaping anti-slavery ideals.
The alkylation of 1-benzazepines...	...how reliably the addition of alkyl groups transforms the molecular shape of these compounds into a more applicable, marketable form...	[Immediate]...how replicable previous studies of alkylation may be. [Long-term]...whether synthesizing these compounds can contribute to more efficient manufacture of antiretroviral treatments for HIV.
The origins of the Glass-Steagall Act...	...why lawmakers supported its passage...	...that their motives resulted not from careful economic analysis but rather from ideological preconceptions about the role of commercial banks in society.
I am studying ...	because I want to find out...	so that readers understand...