



THE GLOBE PROGRAM

Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment

Characteristics of a Good Research Question

A good research question is a question that is worth answering. It poses a problem worth solving. Simple yes or no questions may have important practical significance, but generally they do not make good research questions. A good science question requires more than looking up something in a book or on the Internet. The answer does not simply depend on one or two missing facts. A good research question should force you to evaluate evidence and compare different possible answers.

Given that answering good science questions requires some real work on your part, it is best if the question interests you. It is also good if the question and its answer will interest others. In presenting your research it is important to make clear to others why your question and answer are interesting and important.

This worksheet provides a list of characteristics of good research questions. When you consider a research question for your investigation, evaluate it with this list. A good question does not need to have all these characteristics, but you should think carefully before committing to answer a question that has only a few of them.

Example

Consider the following two related questions.

1. Is there a relationship between today's clouds and tomorrow's weather?
2. How reliable is a prediction of tomorrow's weather based on today's cloud observations?

To practice using this worksheet, score each of the sample questions using the following table of characteristics. Give one point for each characteristic the question has. If you don't know how to score any line, leave it blank. Which of these questions has the higher score?



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Research Question Characteristics Worksheet	Points (0 or 1)
The answer is not immediately obvious	
There could be more than one answer - the answer is not just yes or no	
Encourages a new or different view of phenomena	
Narrow in focus so that the necessary research can be done	
Clear enough for other people to understand	
Tests an accepted explanation	
Completes or adapts an existing explanation	
Goes beyond existing explanations	
Possible to answer in the time available to you	
Possible to answer with measurement equipment and techniques available to you	
Any data required from others is available or can be obtained through collaboration	
Will sustain your interest for the time required to complete the research	
Tests your assumptions about the phenomenon	
Total Points	