**FROM TOPIC TO RESEARCH QUESTION**

After choosing a topic and gathering background information, add focus with a research question.

**Explore Questions**

- Ask open-ended “how” and “why” questions about your general topic.
- Consider the “so what” of your topic. Why does this topic matter to you? Why should it matter to others?
- Reflect on the questions you have considered. Identify one or two questions you find engaging and which could be explored further through research.

**Determine and Evaluate Your Research Question**

What aspect of the more general topic you will explore?

- Is your research question clear?
- Is your research question focused?
- Is your research question complex?

*Note*- Research questions must be specific enough to be well covered in the space available. Questions shouldn’t have a simple yes/no answer and should require research and analysis.

**Hypothesize**

- After you’ve come up with a question, consider the path your answer might take.
  - If you are making an argument, what will you say?
    - Why does your argument matter?
    - How might others challenge your argument?
    - What kind of sources will you need to support your argument?

**Sample Research Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clarity</th>
<th>Simple vs. Complex</th>
<th>Focused</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unclear</strong>: Why are social networking sites harmful?</td>
<td><strong>Too simple</strong>: How are doctors addressing diabetes in the U.S.?</td>
<td><strong>Unfocused</strong>: What is the effect on the environment from global warming?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clear</strong>: How are online users experiencing or addressing privacy issues on social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook?</td>
<td><strong>Appropriately complex</strong>: What are common traits of those suffering from diabetes in America, and how can these commonalities be used to aid the medical community in prevention of the disease?</td>
<td><strong>Focused</strong>: How is glacial melting affecting penguins in Antarctica?</td>
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Adapted from: George Mason university Writing Center. (2008). How to Write a Research Question.