

[See this page in the course material.](#)

Learning Outcomes

Evaluate preliminary research strategies

As we have discussed, all research is based upon your research question. Having a well-defined and scoped question is essential to a good research strategy. If your question is not specific enough, or if it lacks boundaries (i.e., it is not well-scoped), your subsequent strategy will be difficult to maintain.

Steely Library discusses developing a good research question in the video below:



[Video Link](#)

The Human Fund

Let's return to Martha's case. We can recall that her research question was,

"Is The Human Fund's work helping homeless families in downtown Chicago?"

If we first break her question down into its sub-parts, developing a research strategy will be much easier. Her question asks,

1. Is The Human Fund's work — i.e., what The Human Fund does — its actions

2. helping — i.e., we must define “helping” in relation to...
3. ...the homeless families...
4. ...in downtown Chicago?

From her question, we know that we will need sources that,

1. Outline The Human Fund’s activities
2. Define how charities and government help the homeless in their cities
3. Help to define and understand “homeless”
4. Are geographically bound to downtown Chicago

With the above in mind, any secondary source that does not specifically address a part of the question above—and how it is broken down—will be off topic or out of scope.

We will also recall that Martha conducted background reading (i.e., secondary source reading) before determining the type of primary source material (i.e., fieldwork and interviews with the homeless) she would use. This can be confusing; when we research, we do background or secondary source reading before determining what primary source material might still be needed. You will *not* typically see a research process that advocates doing primary source research when there is already secondary source material available on a given topic because it is not efficient. It is also important to note that if secondary source material sufficiently addresses your research question, consider this to be a win; this means that the much slower and much more elaborate primary source research process is no longer required. Your report will be that much faster to compile. If Martha, for example, had recent accounts of interviews with homeless people in downtown Chicago about The Human Fund’s work, she would not need to conduct her own interviews.

practice questions

When you’re thinking about starting your project, what’s typically the first thing you should nail down?

- ☐ First start with a well scoped research question.

[See this interactive in the course material.](#)

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