

- **A clear causal relationship.** A research question usually identifies a puzzle by working with two major concepts in which you'll investigate a cause and effect. Research questions can be written a multitude of different ways, but ultimately it will be narrowed down to a cause and effect relationship. Remember, it is a question, so it should be phrased as an open-ended puzzle asking if two ideas connect to one another.
- **What's meant by being "anchored in the discipline"?** Developing a political science research question requires situating your topic within the debates and literature of our discipline. Political science professors around the country publish scholarly articles and books where they outline their own research. Your topic will be structured on the shoulders of this work.
- **Consider narrowing your question to a specific time period and geographic location.** You can't take on the whole world. Often times, thesis projects are focused on a very narrow time period or geographic location. Think about it: you cannot sensibly answer a question that applies to the entire nation, state, or even city. Is it possible to investigate your idea in a local area? in a specific time period? Will this help you in terms of coming up with evidence down the line.
- **Make sure the question is *crystal* clear.** The research question is the heart of your thesis. In early months, students often have a convoluted and wordy research question. Your research question should be narrowed down to a one-sentence, concise statement where your two topics are clearly identifiable.

Finally, remember that you're in charge of answering this question. You must be at least somewhat confident that this question will lead to a feasible, practical project. Don't make your life harder than it has to be, pick a question that you can provide evidence for later on.

## Answering the Question with the Argument

The argument is simply your answer to the research question. Perhaps differently than any other paper you have written before, both the research question and argument should be clearly articulated in the opening pages of your thesis. Thus, while we are doing this work to ensure your project is viable, you will be explicitly presenting your question and argument in the introduction to your thesis. Typically, the exposition and identification of your question and argument should be around 3-5 pages in your final product.

- **Like your question, the argument is *crystal* clear.** If the question is the heartbeat of your thesis, the argument is the heart of the thesis. Like the research question, the argument should be narrowed down to a one-sentence, concise statement.
- **Your question and argument should clearly connect.** Since we do a lot of work on the question and argument separately, sometimes they do not connect. Make sure that your question and argument directly answer one another. They should both be one-sentence long, but write them down side-by-side, it should make sense together!
- **Do not introduce a new idea or concept.** Do not bring a new idea into the fold with the argument. The argument is a definitive statement about how the causal relationship you first raised with the research question. Whatever research question you end up with, it can

be answered in a multitude of different ways. What is your perspective as to how it should be answered?

- **Hypotheses?** Often in research, we work with hypotheses. It is beneficial to think of hypotheses as falling under the umbrella of your argument. Hypotheses are optional to include in the thesis, but they are testable statements positing a relationship between concepts. Your argument itself could be seen as a major hypothesis. Some students elect to break down their argument into multiple, testable hypotheses that they examine in the analysis. Again, this is completely optional but something to think about.
- **Look ahead... you have no choice.** Can you provide evidence to prove this question? Will your evidence be convincing? Will this evidence fit the standards set forth by our discipline? You are responsible for proving this argument, thus ahead and try your best not only to envision what the entire thesis may look like. Remember, this has to be a plausible, practical, and *provable* thesis.

At this point, you are ready to start doing some heavy lifting with your ideas. The topic, question, and argument should be as solidified as possible, but it is fair to say that your ideas will evolve as you progress through your project. Nonetheless, feel confident that you have laid the groundwork for what will ultimately be a successful endeavor.