

Finding your research question

Your research question or hypothesis drives your search: it defines your purpose.

As we frame our question, there are two things we need to be clear about. The first is what we think exists, what in our view are the important elements of the situation or problem we want to research. These are the ontological assumptions at the heart of our research.

Ontological assumptions

- 1 What is the nature of the reality you're investigating?
- 2 How is it made up?
- 3 How do its parts interact?

The second thing we need to pin down is our epistemological assumptions about what we believe should count as knowledge in this context: the sort of evidence that would count as an answer to our question and how we are to come by it.

Epistemological assumptions

- 1 The sort of evidence that would count as an answer
- 2 How you are to find it

As you can see, these epistemological questions will determine how you frame your research question, which will, in turn, determine the literature you review and the methods you employ.

Treasure hunting

Look for:

- 1 Ideas
- 2 Information
- 3 Methods – gathering and analysing evidence
- 4 Presentation of findings
- 5 Development of arguments
- 6 How conclusions are drawn

Mapping out the territory

- 1 The context – current issues
- 2 Up-to-date references
- 3 Classic texts
- 4 List of sources
- 5 Start reading crucial texts



For more information, see *How to Write Your Literature Review*, Chapter 5.