

FROM INTERESTS TO QUESTIONS

this workshop based on chapter 3 of Booth et al. The Craft of Research.

A. (5) Name five things you are interested in (36.8). Try to make these as different as possible from one another so that they don't overlap.

Thing	Comment/Explanation
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

(5) Write a sentence or two about each explaining or commenting on each of your interests.

B. (10) Review how Booth, et al. define “topic.” Now pick **one** of these *interests* and identify three *topics* connected to it that are in some loose way sociological or anthropological.

Interest:

Topic	What makes it interesting?	What makes it promising?
1		
2		
3		

Since we are heading in the direction of a research project, we want to think for a moment about what makes each of these interesting and promising.

C. (10) Now we want to think about the broadness or narrowness of the topics (see 37.6-39.1)

For each of your topics, try to think about it in both directions: start with what you have and think about what a much broader question would be and then think about what a much narrow question would be. In its original form it might be a bit too broad or a bit too narrow. What we want to do is to sketch the spectrum.

Topic	Too Broad	Broad	Narrow	Too Narrow
1				
2				
3				

PROCESS: (5+5+10 min) Volunteers (2) one who feels they “got it” and one who did not. Pair and spend 5 minutes discussing, improving material so far.

D. From narrowed topic to questions

When we have a topic that is Interesting, Promising, and Narrowed, we can start asking questions.

YOUR NARROWED TOPIC: _____

(10 minutes) Brainstorm questions about your topic. Write questions that make sense in your field and around this topic. Who, what, when, where, why, how? (10 minutes for review)

Who	
What	
When	
Where	
Why	
How	
Whether	

E. (20 min) Now we will engage in a structured approach to questioning our topic:

Parts and Wholes

Ask about components or parts of your topic	Ask about things of which your topic is a part or component, systems it is part of
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History and Change

Ask questions about the natural history of your topic. How does it unfold in time, change over time?	Ask questions about the larger history in which your topic is embedded.
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Categories and Cases

<p>What are the categories of variation within your topic? Different types or varieties or species?</p>	<p>What are the different things that your topic might be an exemplar or case of?</p>
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Value

<p>How does your topic touch on moral values? Things people care about?</p>	<p>What are the moral dimensions within your topic?</p>
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F. (20 + 15 min) From question to significance

1. Name the topic: "I am working on/studying NOUN PHRASE

2. Suggest a question "because I want to find out who/what/why/when/where/whether/how SUBJECT + VERB

3. Motivate the question: "in order to understand how/why/whether..."

- how to do something
- how something happens
- why something happens rather than something else
- whether something is something or something else