

Hypothesis or Research Question

Ask your faculty mentor whether a *hypothesis* or *research question* is more appropriate for your field of research.

Hypothesis

What are you expecting to find? Your hypothesis will focus your ideas and information. It is the proposed answer to a research question, which you will finalize only after completing the research. (It's okay to modify and revise the working thesis as you research more about the topic or issue.) State the hypothesis precisely—do not oversimplify, and don't exaggerate. Your hypothesis should cover exactly the topic you want to talk about, no more and no less. Why commit yourself to an extreme opinion that you don't really believe in, and then look like you're contradicting yourself later on?

or

Research Question

What is the question that underlies and drives forward your research?

Most social science research originates from some general problem or question. You might, for instance, be interested in what programs enable the unemployed to get jobs. Usually, the problem is broad enough that you could not hope to address it adequately in a single research study. Consequently, we typically narrow the problem down to a more specific **research question** that we can hope to address. The research question is often stated in the context of some theory that has been advanced to address the problem.

For instance, we might have the theory that ongoing support services are needed to assure that the newly employed remain employed. The research question is the central issue being addressed in the study and is often phrased in the language of theory. For instance, a research question might be: *Is a program of supported employment more effective (than no program at all) at keeping newly employed persons on the job?* (Retrieved from <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/strucres.php> on 5/27/08.)

It is important to have a good quality research question that you can actually answer during your 10 weeks of research with McNair Scholars. Make sure the question interests you enough to spark your own thoughts and opinions. Ask yourself, is the question easily and fully researchable (e.g., can I really research 30 online writing programs developed over a span of 10 years)? Is my question too broad, too narrow, or okay? What info will you need to answer the research question, and do you have access to those resources (journals, books, internet resources, government documents, people, etc.)?