**From UC Merced:**

**What Makes a Good Research Topic?**

* When you “Think Like a Researcher” you are focused on a research ***question*** rather than a research ***topic***.
* You must also be able to ***articulate the problem*** that underlies the question.
* This problem must have ***social significance****.*
* The solution you argue for in your proposal must be ***arguable*** and ***feasible*** based on reliable evidence.

**Examples**

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|  | **Issue**  **(Broad)**  What is the issue or overall topic that interests you? | **Research Question (Narrower)**  What is a specific research question you want to investigate? | **Underlying Problem(s)**  What is the problem that makes your question worth investigating?  Is this an actual problem or an assumed problem? | **Social Significance**  Does your problem have social significance? |
| 1 | Organic Farming | Are fruits and vegetables grown on organic farms healthier than those grown on conventional farms? | Conventional farming may produce vegetables with pesticide residues leaving individuals susceptible to preventable diseases. | Human health  Environment |
| 2 | Rising Cost of a College Education | Is a college education worth the investment for students in the social sciences? | Many students are emerging from 4-year degree programs with staggering student debt and no job prospects. | Debt Unemployment Value of Education |
| 3 | Law Enforcement Practices | How do local police units allocate funding and prioritize protection for all of its community members? | Less prosperous areas are not receiving the policing protection afforded to more affluent areas. | Public Safety  (In)equality |
|  | **Issue (Broad)** | **Research Question**  **(Narrower)** | **Underlying Problem(s)** | **Social Significance** |
| 4 | Campus Safety | Does under-age alcohol use contribute to a higher incidence of date rape on college campuses? | Inappropriate use of alcohol contributes to a number of social issues including date rape. Date rape causes severe emotional distress, jeopardizing personal and professional goals. | Public Health (Mental & Emotional)  Public Safety |
| 5 | Violence in the Media | Do violent video games contribute to school shootings and other mass murders? | School shootings and mass murders cause great pain and suffering to victims and families. | Crime Prevention  Gun Control |
| 6 | Violence in the Media | How do first-person shooter games affect the psychology of their players? | First-person shooter games reduce players’ level of self-control and empathy which increases criminal violence. | Mental Health  Public Safety |