

The Bedford Researcher: <http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/bedfordresearcher/>

Activity: Test the Scope of Your Research Question

Directions: In this activity, you will be asked to identify vague words and phrases in your research question. Then you will be asked to replace them with more focused words and phrases. The result will be a research question that will be easier to work with as you collect and evaluate information.

Step 1: List Your Research Question:

My research question:

Step 2: Identify Vague Words and Phrases

Since there are many possible causes behind the growing popularity of women's sports, the following research question is unnecessarily broad. By identifying vague words and phrases, you can begin the process of replacing them with more focused words and phrases. The result will be a more narrowly focused research question--and, ideally, a much more effective search for information on the topic.

Example: What is behind the **increased popularity** in **women's sports**?

The words and phrases highlighted in color are vague and/or general. Look for vague words and phrases in your research question, then type them below:

Vague Words and Phrases in My Research Question:

Step 3: Revise Vague Words and Phrases

After you've identified vague words and phrases, identify replacements for them. Consider the following example, in which the vague words and phrases in the first question have been replaced with more focused words and phrases in the second question.

Example 1: What is behind the **increased popularity** in **women's sports**?

Example 2: What is behind the **increased participation** in **women's sports in colleges and universities**?

The words and phrases highlighted in color in the first example are vague and/or general. The second example replaces these words with more focused words and phrases. Consider the vague words and phrases you've identified in your research question, then type substitutes for them:

More Specific Words and Phrases:

Step 4: Revise Your Research Question

Ask yourself whether the replacements you've found for the vague words and phrases in your research question could be used to strengthen your research question. Consider the following example, in which the vague words and phrases in the first question have been replaced with more focused words and phrases in the second question.

Example 1: What is behind the **increased popularity** in **women's sports**?

Example 2: What is behind the **increased participation** in **women's sports in colleges and universities**?

The words and phrases highlighted in color in the first example are vague and/or general. The second example replaces these words with more focused words and phrases. Turn to your own research question and decide whether your list of more specific words and phrases can help you revise your research question:

My revised research question: