What is a research question?

A research question is a clear, focused, concise, complex, and arguable question around which you center your research. You should ask a question about an issue that you are genuinely curious and/or passionate about.
Why is a research question essential to the research process?

Research questions help writers focus their research by providing a path through the research and writing process.

The specificity of a well-developed research question helps writers avoid the “all-about” paper and work toward supporting a specific, arguable thesis.
Steps to developing a research question:

1. Choose an interesting general topic. Even directed academic research should focus on a topic in which the writer is at least somewhat personally invested. Writers should choose a broad topic about which they genuinely would like to know more. An example of a general topic might be “Slavery in the American South” or “Films of the 1930s.”

2. Do some preliminary research on your general topic. Do a few quick searches in current periodicals and journals on your topic to see what’s already been done and to help you narrow your focus. What questions does this early research raise?
From Broad Topics to Focused Ones

- A topic is too broad if you can state it in 3 to 6 words
- The history of commercial aviation
  - There is a history of commercial aviation. (Weak claim)
- The role of race in elections
  - Race plays a role in elections. (Weak claim)
From Broad Topics to Focused Ones

How to fix it? **Narrow your topics by adding verbs that express actions or relationships**

- the history of commercial aviation → The *contribution* of the military in *developing DC-3* in the *early years of commercial aviation*.

- In the early years of commercial aviation, the military *contributed* to the way DC-3 *developed*.

- It’s a claim that is still THIN but much stronger.
Race plays a role in elections ➔ the influence of race on voter turnout in the last 4 presidential elections.

Voter turnout in the last 4 presidential elections has been influenced by racial demographics.

BE CAREFUL NOT TO NARROW TOO MUCH!