

Writing an Effective Central Question & Thesis Statement



Sport & American Society
Research Paper

Some of your topics (a partial list)

- The Miracle on Ice & Cold War
- Esports
- College football recruiting
- American v. global soccer
- Allen Iverson & impact on fashion
- Evolution of Super Bowl ads
- Sports in age of Covid
- Red Sox & marathon bombing
- Gender equity in NCAA basketball
- Sexualization of female athletes
- Evolution of airsoft
- NBA's role in globalization of bball
- Name, image, likeness
- Cheating in pro sports
- Technology in soccer
- Modern athlete activism
- NBA/WNBA pay gap
- M. Jordan (rise of Nike, athlete/businessman)
- Sports tech impact on fans & analysts
- Biohacking & sports science
- Muhammad Ali
- Hall of fame criteria & steroids
- Football concussions & CTE
- College athletes & pay
- Moneyball & impact on MLB
- Famous football rivalries



The Central Question...

- Establishes a connection between your topic and U.S. history, culture, and/or society.
- Provides your paper with scholarly significance -- why the reader should care about your paper.
- Can't be written without some knowledge of U.S. history/culture in the period related to your topic
- The question should lend itself to an analytical & argumentative response (the thesis) -- NOT a factual answer.

Other things to keep in mind...



- Your topic can be broad (i.e., technology in sports), but your Central Question & Thesis need to be narrow and focused
- You are writing 4-8 pages, not a book. It's better to be narrowly focused than to barely scratch the surface of your topic.
- Coming up with a central question that can be answered succinctly is one of the challenges of this assignment.

Steps for Writing a Central Question:



- Choose a topic
- Research -- start with general background on the topic (overview) & time period (social, political, economic, cultural landscape)
- Use what you know from your reading to formulate a question
- Considering what you know now, how might you answer that question? (tentative thesis)
 - As you keep researching, you will probably revise that thesis and possibly fine tune your question as well.

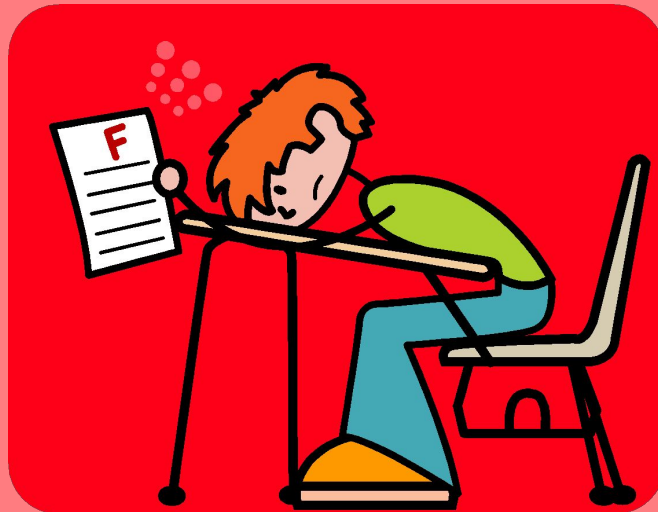
BAD CENTRAL QUESTIONS

- What is the history of the Olympics?



WHY IS THIS BAD?

- Too broad
- Answer to the question is factual
- Lacks an explicit connection to American history/culture/society



MORE BADDIES

- Did the USA hockey's victory over the Russians in the 1984 Olympics help to end the Cold War?



WHY IS THIS BAD?

- Yes / no question
- Difficult to decisively answer - how would you prove this?

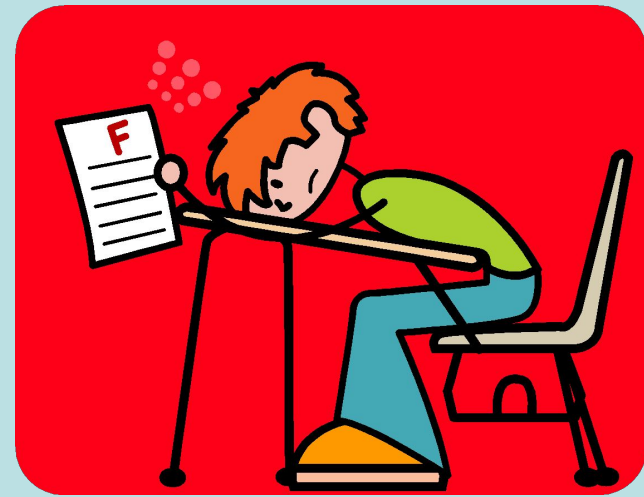


YET ANOTHER BAD QUESTION



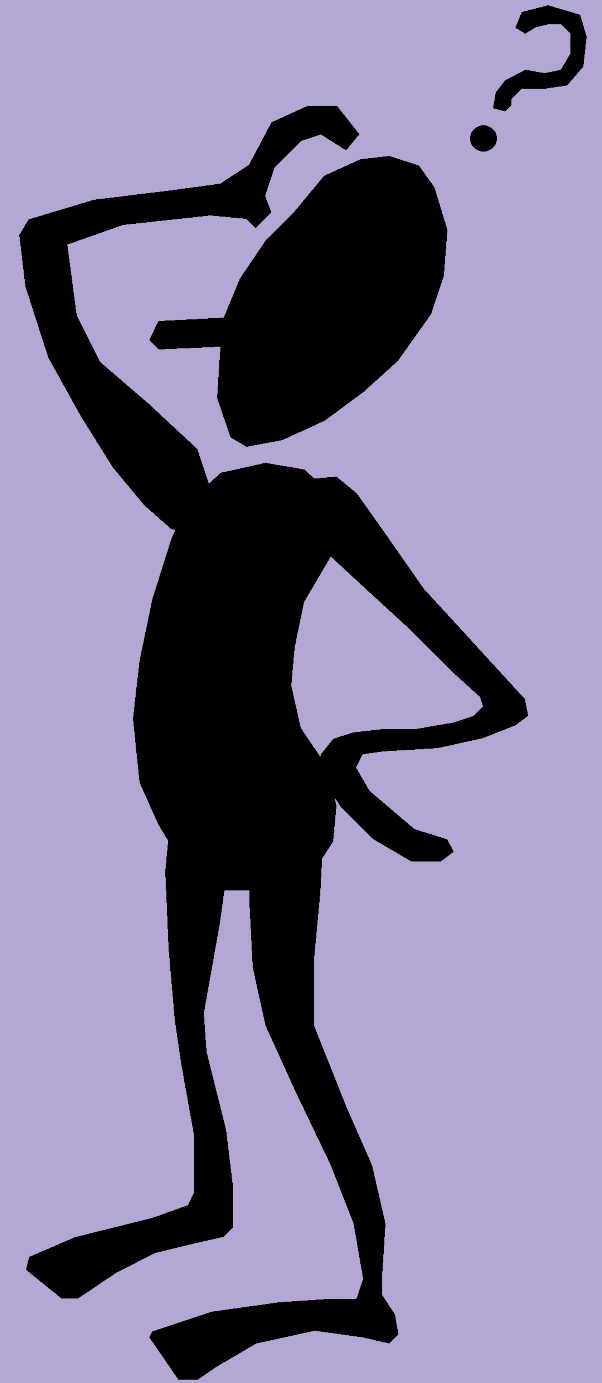
- Who's the true GOAT - Michael Jordan or Lebron James?

WHY IS THIS BAD?

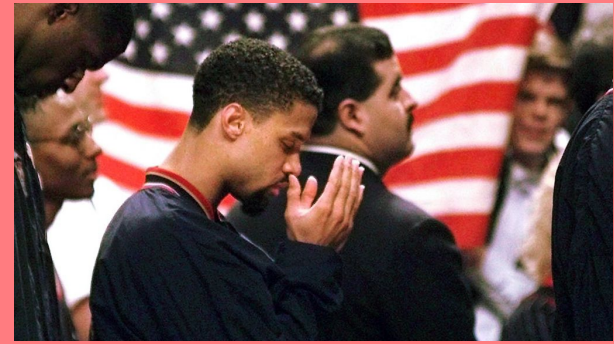


- Too broad
- Hard to measure/prove - so many uncontrollable variables
- Again, no explicit connection to American society or culture
- Does not explain the person's importance to the game/league/society

What would
a GOOD
research
question look
like?



Topic Example: Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf



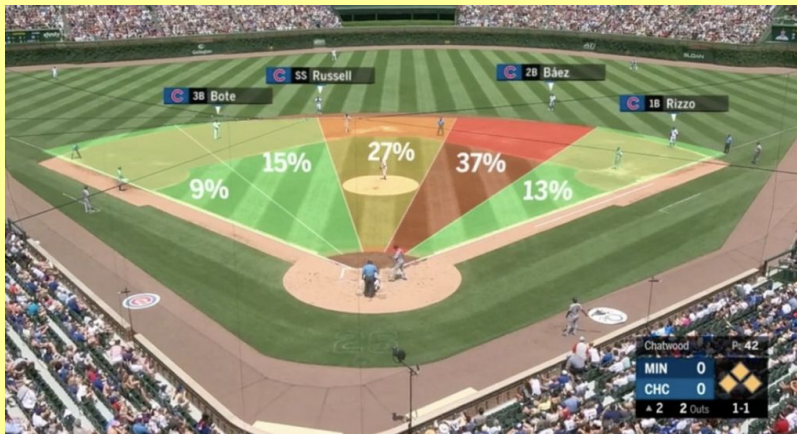
- Potential Central Question:
 - How can the backlash to Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf's anthem protest be used to understand the NBA in the 1990s?
- Analytical Thesis Statement:
 - Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf's anthem protest & the public backlash to it reflected American conservatism and a league that as a result did not support activism among its athletes.

Topic Example: WNBA Draft Regulations



- Potential Central Question:
 - Are WNBA rules requiring athletes to complete 4 years of college or international play prior to being admitted to the draft in the best interest of both the players & the league?
- Analytical Thesis Statement:
 - Current league regulations barring women from participating in the WNBA draft until they've completed 4 years of college or international play are not in the best interest of the players or the league and should be amended.

Topic Example: Technology in baseball



- Potential Central Question:
 - How is the integration of technology into the game of baseball helping to make baseball entertaining to a wider audience?
- Analytical Thesis Statement:
 - The integration of technology in baseball has both broadened its fan base and helped to engage existing audiences in new ways.

Topic Example: Patriotism in the NFL

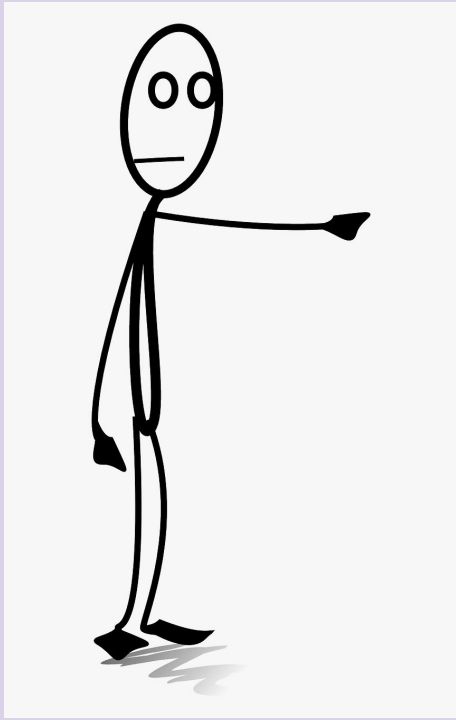


- Potential Central Question:
 - How is the NFL's response to anthem protests reflective of a broader NFL culture which prioritizes honor, patriotism and military over protest?
- Analytical Thesis Statement:
 - The NFL's response to athletes who engage in protest is reflective of the NFL owners' more conservative politics and the close relationship between the military and the NFL.



Topic Example: Evolution of women's sports uniforms

- Potential Central Question:
 - How does the evolution of women's sports uniforms reflect commonly held societal views of women?
- Analytical Thesis Statement:
 - The evolution of women's sports uniforms over the course of the 20th century is a reflection of the changing social and political views on women's rights and roles.

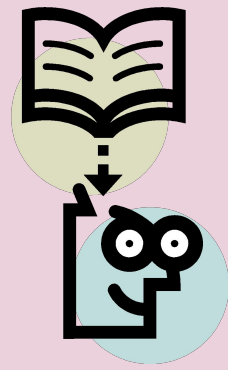


Now it's your turn.

Take your topic and the notes you've gathered so far.

How can you connect your topic to something bigger? Something that matters?

The purpose of RESEARCH QUESTIONS



- Once you've established your central question and tentative thesis, you are going to want to write several research or inquiry questions.
- The goal is to identify the smaller areas you would need to research in order to really understand all of the nuances of your topic.
- In order to answer the big question, what smaller questions do you need to be able to answer first?

For example...

If I were to write a paper on Jackie Robinson & his role in the integration of baseball and in the broader civil rights movement, I might start with the following questions or areas of research:

- When did Robinson join the MLB? What was his background in baseball prior to that?
- Why did the MLB decide to integrate? Who supported/opposed this action?
- What was happening with other professional sports leagues at this time? Was the MLB the only integrated league?
- How was Robinson treated on the field by his teammates and opposing teams? How did fans (both black and white) respond to him and did that vary by city/region of the country? the press when he joined the league?
- How did Robinson perform in the MLB? What was his record on the field? (How did that compare to white athletes? How did people react to his performance?)
- What was going on in the U.S. at the time he joined the league? (politically, socially, economically.)
- What was happening in the Civil Rights Movement at that time and in the years before?
- How were African-Americans regarded in society at the time?
- What political/social mobilization (if any) existed within the black community?
- What (if anything) did Robinson do off the field with respect to civil rights?
- How did Robinson change the game of baseball?

NOW YOU DO IT!

