

# 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

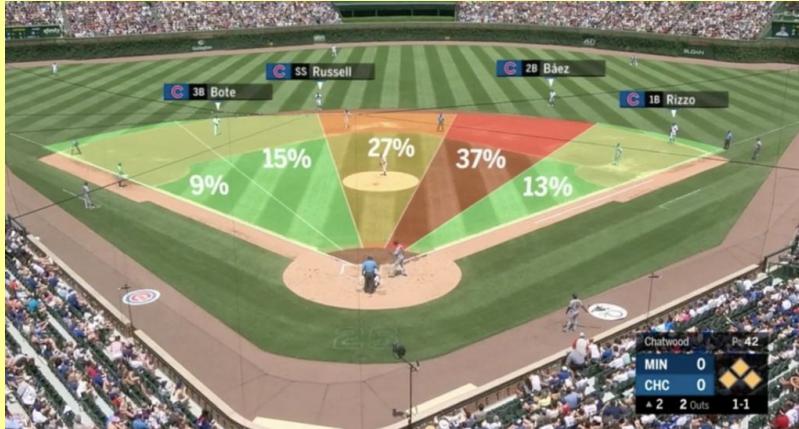


- Potential Central Question:
  - How can the backlash to Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf's anthem protest be used to understand the NBA in the 1990s?
- Analytical Thesis Statement:
  - Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf's anthem protest & the public backlash to it reflected American conservatism and a league that as a result did 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



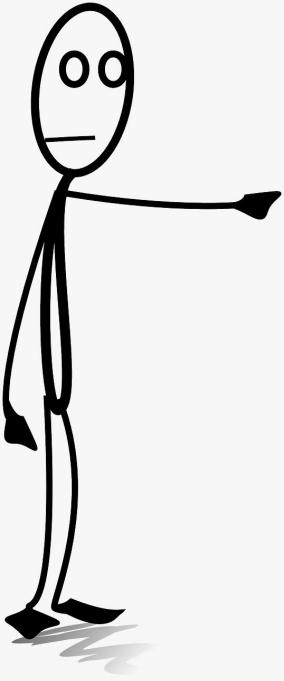
- Potential Central Question:
  - How is the NFL's response to anthem protests reflective of a broader NFL culture which prioritizes honor, patriotism and military over protest?
- Analytical Thesis Statement:
  - The NFL's response to athletes who engage in protest is reflective of the NFL owners' more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

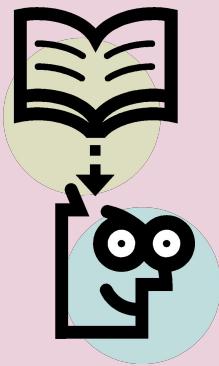


# Now it's your turn.

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!

