**How to ask a research question**

[MUSIC PLAYING]

All research begins with questions, questions that come from curiosity or from the need to solve a problem. Often these questions start with who, why, how, or what. When you're writing a research argument for a college class, it's natural to start with a big question, a question too broad for the scope of your assignment.

But then you've got to narrow it down to something more manageable. It's like, you're not going to eat a whole pizza yourself. One slice is enough. But not just any question works. For a research argument, you have to argue with evidence and take a position in a debate. Let's say you're really interested in social protests.

[YELLING]

If you ask a factual question, you'll find that while a lot has been written about this topic, there isn't much of a debate about it. You'd be collecting facts and reporting on what others have written, but you wouldn't have a position to argue.

You may find that even when you narrow your question, your topic is still too big. Try taking an even smaller, more specific slice. That can mean more flavor. Now you'll enter a lively debate among historians, sociologists, and journalists with a range of positions on the topic. Nice.

As you preview sources in the debate, make sure you keep track of the different arguments you encounter and the most influential researchers. Keep track of where the debate seems to be happening, popular media, scholarly media, or social media.

Now that you've got your more controversial research question, continue to use the words who, why, how, and what to guide your research about this specific debate. A research argument starts with a good question, a specific, interesting question about something that matters to you and that is arguable, not factual. Keep asking who, why, how, and what. Crafting a good research question will help you get the evidence you need to make your argument, no matter which way you go with it.