Questions at Issue

Scholars ask questions to promote productive conversations with their colleagues and to generate their own ideas for research. Some of the most common types of these questions at issue are the following:

**Questions of Fact:** What happened?
*Examples:* What was the actual outcome of an event? What resulted from an experiment? Who was ultimately responsible?

**Questions of Definition:** How should we define or classify this?
*Examples:* What category does this object or event best fit into? Which theory is this an example of?

**Questions of Cause:** How did this come to happen?
*Examples:* What chain of events led to this outcome? What mitigating factors or extenuating circumstances might have contributed?

**Questions of Value:** How good or bad is this?
*Examples:* Is this outcome morally just? Is this object of high or low aesthetic quality? Is this decision well-founded or ill-considered?

**Questions of Policy:** What should we do next?
*Examples:* What proposals need to be made? What next steps will be most effective? What changes will solve this problem?

Different disciplines place emphasis on these questions in varying ways:

**Arts and Humanities** (such as literature, art history, modern languages, and philosophy)
Kinds of research questions asked (often FACT, DEFINITION, CAUSE, and VALUE):
- What is the most persuasive interpretation of a work of art or literature?
- How can we interpret the significance of a historical event?
- How do historical circumstances affect culture?

**Social Sciences** (such as sociology, economics, anthropology, psychology, and education)
Kinds of research questions asked (often DEFINITION, CAUSE, VALUE, and POLICY):
- How do gender, ethnicity, or economic class affect an individual?
- How do societies arrive at customs, morals, and laws?
- How can we predict economic trends?
- How can we improve human cognition?

**Natural Sciences** (such as biology, chemistry, geology, or physics)
Kinds of research questions asked (often FACT, DEFINITION, CAUSE, and POLICY):
- What can we learn about one species by studying another?
- How can we control the behaviors of chemicals we need to work with?
- What can we deduce from the age of certain portions of the earth?

**Applied Sciences** (such as engineering, medicine, or mathematics)
Kinds of research questions asked (often CAUSE, VALUE, and POLICY):
- How can we predict the way some set of data (such as population) will change over time?
- Which of several possible models will provide the most stability, safety, and cost-effectiveness?
- Which treatment option is best for a particular medical condition?
- How will a structure affect its natural and aesthetic environment?