

What's My Question?



Preparing for a successful field investigation begins with developing a question that is researchable. While there are numerous important “big picture” questions about the environment and how people interact with the environment, many questions are too broad to be answered with a single investigation. Asking a question that can be tested or researched is a key part of scientific inquiry.

As you consider questions about your local environment to investigate, it is important to consider what observations you will be able to make, and whether those observations will help answer your investigative question. One way to help with this process is to categorize your investigative questions into one of three categories. Use the boxes below to record researchable questions you would like to investigate.

1. Questions about the big picture. List questions here that are too big to answer with a single field investigation:

2. Questions that help us describe. List questions here that focus on a single aspect of your local environment—questions that you can find answers to by measuring, observing, describing or mapping. These questions help us describe parts of a natural system such as how many, how frequently, how much, what happened, when, and where?

3. Questions that help us compare. List questions here that compare changes within a population or differences between groups. Observations may be made either on a single population under various conditions (time of year, location) or on different populations. Comparative questions ask, what will happen to the measured variable when one of the changes occurs?

4. Questions that help us correlate. List questions here that involve measuring or observing two variables and searching for a pattern. Correlative questions ask, what is the relationship between two variables?

Adapted from *Field Investigations: Using Outdoor Environments to Foster Student Learning of Scientific Processes*. 2007. Pacific Education Institute and Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies.

