



Young Researcher Network



Session 1: Writing your research question and formulating a hypothesis (Stage 4 of YRN Toolkit)



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The National Youth Agency (NYA) is one of three Education Support organisations to receive funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government, under the Local Government Finance Act 1988. The Local Government Association (LG Association) has oversight of the NYA's work supported by this funding. The annual funding supports key areas of the NYA's work and promotes the role of local government and its partners in youth policy.



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Time	Session activities	Resources
5 minutes	<p>Icebreaker/energizer</p> <p>Spend five minutes on an icebreaker, such as the Toilet Paper Game (particularly good if the participants don't know each other very well). Pass a roll of toilet paper round the group, and say that each participant should take as many squares of toilet paper as they wish. Don't reveal what the activity is until everyone has taken some toilet paper. Then say that participants must tell the rest of the group some interesting facts about themselves – one for every square of toilet paper they've taken!</p>	One roll of toilet paper
5 minutes	<p>Introduction and aims</p> <p>Explain that the aims of this session (and write them on a piece of flipchart paper if desired) are for participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To understand what a research question is and why it is important ● To understand the different types of research question ● To understand what a hypothesis is 	Flipchart paper, marker pen
5 minutes	<p>Research questions – introduction</p> <p>Begin by explaining that a research question is what participants will try and answer with their research project. It states the purpose of the whole investigation.</p> <p>Explain that there are three types of question you can ask, depending on whether you want to explore, describe or explain something.</p> <p>You might want to write the following questions on pieces of flipchart paper as examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How do 13 to 16-year-old boys from Birmingham access youth provision? (exploratory) ● What are the different types of youth provision on offer for 13 to 16-year-old boys in Birmingham? (descriptive) ● Why do 13 to 16 year-old-boys perform better in single sex leisure activities? (explanatory) 	Flipchart paper, pens

Time	Session activities	Resources
15 minutes	<p>Activity: different types of research question</p> <p>Divide the participants into sub-groups of three or four, and give each a set of cards (see Activity Sheet for Session 1). Ask them to spread out the cards on a table and divide them into three groups: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory.</p> <p>Remind them when sorting the cards to think about if each question is aiming to explore, describe or explain a certain issue. Give the sub-groups ten minutes to complete the activity, and then take five minutes to go through the answers together.</p> <p>Answers</p> <p>Exploratory:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How can looked after children and young people in Manchester contribute to the review process? ● What can be done to make school councils in Devon more popular with pupils? ● How can young people in Sussex be encouraged to access sexual health provision? <p>Descriptive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What are the experiences of education for young people in care? ● How are young people portrayed in the UK media? ● What are the different ways a young person in Yorkshire can get her voice heard about issues that affect her? <p>Explanatory:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Why do more boys attend our local youth club than girls? ● Why do the young people in the Derbyshire youth forum tend to be aged 15 or over? ● Why are there more negative than positive stories about young people in the media? 	<p>Research question cards (one set for each group) cut up from Activity Sheet for Session 1</p>

Time	Session activities	Resources
5 minutes	<p>Why it is important to have a clear and focussed research question?</p> <p>Ask participants why they think it is important to have a clear and focussed research question for their project and write their answers on a piece of flipchart. Encourage participants to make the reasons as relevant to the project and the group as possible.</p> <p>Depending on the answers from the group, you might want to explain that it's important to have a clear and focussed research question so that participants and stakeholders (those with an interest in the project) understand exactly what the research project is addressing. A good research question will help the group to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Manage its time effectively ● Remain motivated ● Achieve a carefully planned and evidenced investigation 	Flipchart paper, marker pen

Time	Session activities	Resources
20 minutes	<p>Activity: Try writing your own research question!</p> <p>Ask the group to spend 5 to 10 minutes discussing the following questions to help them come up with a research question of their own, either in smaller sub-groups or altogether:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What do you want to achieve with your research project? Do you want to campaign for change in a particular organisation? 2) What evidence will you need to support your campaign? 3) Are you seeking to explore, describe or explain something with your research? (It could be that you need to do one, two or all of these things – if so, it may be better to have a different question for each aim) <p>Ask the group to spend the remainder of the time thinking of some possible research questions for their own project. Then ask them to check their favourites fulfil these tests:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does it clearly define the limits of your research? E.g. 'What do young people want?' is very vague and the research could be never-ending, but 'What facilities do young people in Nottingham want in their local area?' is much more specific and easier to address. Remember that questions with a narrower scope can be easier to answer and produce more focussed research. • Will you be able to answer your own question? E.g. 'What will young people be doing in ten years' time?' would be almost impossible to tackle! But 'What do young people in London think they'll be doing in ten years' time?' is far more answerable. <p>Remind the group that they need to feel confident that their question will produce the evidence they need, and that they are able to answer it with the time and the resources they have!</p>	Flipchart paper, marker pens

Time	Session activities	Resources
5 minutes	<p>What is a hypothesis?</p> <p>Explain that a hypothesis is your theory about the answer to your research question. You may already have one in mind. For example, if your research question is, 'Why do few young people use the local sports centre?', your hypothesis might be, 'Few young people use the local sports centre because it's difficult for young people to get to it using public transport'. Depending on the complexity of your research question, you may have a number of different hypotheses, one for each aspect or segment of the question.</p> <p>Explain that it's useful to have a hypothesis in mind because it helps to make your research more focussed, and to structure the design of your project. Once you've got a hypothesis in mind, you can design your project to collect data that will prove or disprove your hypothesis. If the data disproves your hypothesis, you can change your hypothesis and collect some more data to prove or disprove it.</p> <p>If the group's own research question is reasonably clear, you might like to ask the group if they have any initial ideas about hypotheses for their own project.</p> <p>Next steps</p> <p>Depending on the stage the group is at with thinking about its own research question, you might like to extend this session to give participants more time for the research question-writing activity. Alternatively, you might like to ask participants to take their ideas from the session to refine their own research question at home, and discuss together at a later date. You might also like to ask participants to spend some time after the session thinking about hypotheses.</p>	

ACTIVITY SHEET FOR SESSION 1

How can looked after children and young people in Manchester contribute to the review process?

What are the experiences of education for young people in care?

How are young people portrayed in the UK media?

Why do more boys attend our local youth club than girls?

Why do the young people in the Derbyshire youth forum tend to be aged 15 or over?

What can be done to make school councils in Devon more popular with pupils?

What are the different ways a young person in Yorkshire can get her voice heard about issues that affect her?

How can young people in Sussex be encouraged to access sexual health provision?

Why are there more negative than positive stories about young people in the media?



About the National Youth Agency

The National Youth Agency works in partnership with a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations to support and improve services for young people. Our particular focus is on youth work and we believe strongly that by investing in young people's personal and social development, young people are better able to live more active and fulfilling lives.

Working with young people, we advocate for more youth-friendly services and policies. We have four themes:

- Developing quality standards in work with young people
- Supporting services for young people
- Developing the youth workforce
- Promoting positive public perceptions of young people.

We deliver our work through training and consultancy, campaigning, publishing and online communications. Through our activities we want to ensure that young people have a strong voice and positive influence in our society.

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