

There's difference between "bad" and "good" questions. **Good** questions are:

<p>Debatable That also means they <i>have been debated</i>. You will need to present a debate, either among historians or among people at the time. You may take a position on the debate yourself.</p>	<p>Narrow You will need to be able to give a credible answer to your question in a concise format. Don't take on a question that is too open-ended.</p>	<p>Significant There must be <i>something important at stake</i> in the answer, not just to you—because you're curious—but in terms of large historical issues. Think "consequences."</p>	<p>Researchable You will both primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources should include books and scholarly journal articles. <i>Do not limit your research entirely to websites.</i></p>
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More about bad and good questions:

Bad question	Good question
Just rewords a topic	Helps you choose evidence
Can be answered from simple factual digging; <i>your knowledge gap doesn't make a paper</i>	Gives you a position on which to take a judgment and make an argument
Too big	Forces you to analyze and think critically
Too vague	Suggests an outline
Morally one-sided	Sends you to a debate you can present and join
Counterfactual—can't be disproven	Suggests what primary evidence to interpret
No accessible primary sources	Suggests what secondary evidence you'll need
Suggests you write a "report." Instead: recall you're an historian -- you are NOT doing a simple chronology or an isolated re-creation.	Answers others' curiosity—including people who know the subject--not just yours

Examples of topics, bad questions, and better questions

Topic: *Causes of the American Civil War*
Bad question: What caused the American Civil War? [too big]
Pretty good question: What were the most important causes of the Civil War? [allows judgment, argument]

Topic: *The Magna Carta*
Bad question: What was the Magna Carta? [answerable with simple facts]
Pretty good question: What forces led to the Magna Carta? [fairly easily answered, but possibly debatable]
Pretty good question: What was the impact of the Magna Carta? [immediate impact is pretty factual, but a longer view allows some debate]
Better question: Who benefited most from the Magna Carta? [requires judgment, analysis to answer, which fosters an argument]
Better question: Was the Magna Carta a precursor to Parliament? [yes or no question, but the answer requires definitions of terms and judgment] – could be improved to: "How did Magna Carta influence the creation of Parliament?"
Good questions: How did Magna Carta influence leading American revolutionaries who (revolted in the 1770s, or drafted the US Constitution)?

