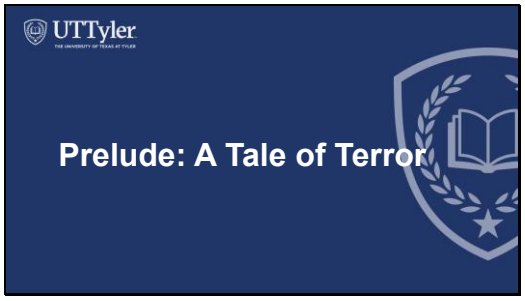
Slide 1

Slide 2

This is my contact information. I am more than happy to meet one-on-one with you to work through anything from identifying a topic to responding to peer reviewer comments!

Slide 3



A Horror Story: I began my diss. in 2010 with 2 yrs. to complete. I wanted to understand the roles of the monster, the hero, and the king in *Beowulf* and how it affected the story. By 2011, I had not gotten very far. At my rope's end, I realized I wasn't even asking a question. I needed a narrow question to make this work. What I landed on was "what makes Grendel a monster?" and was off and running. One year (half the normal time) and 240+ pages later, I defended my diss. successfully.
The moral: the question you ask greatly impacts the sort of answer you will get.

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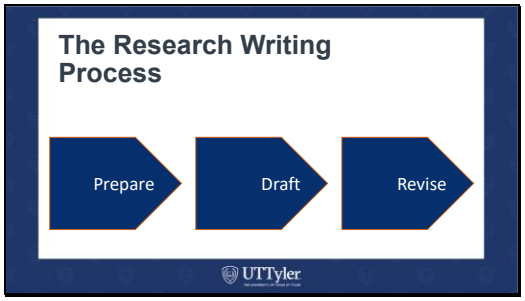

Research writing is a 3-phase process; we're focused on the Preparation phase today.

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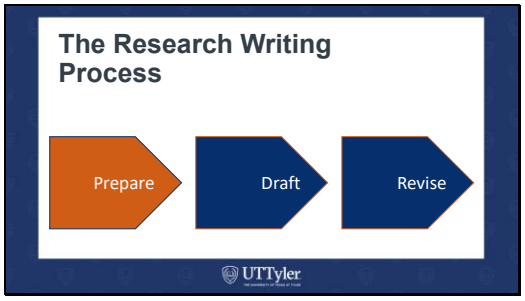

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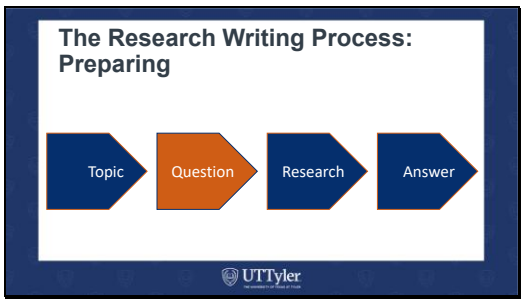

Crafting a research question is actual the *second* step in the research process. So we're in very early days.

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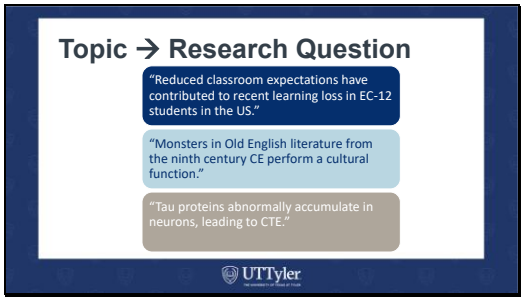
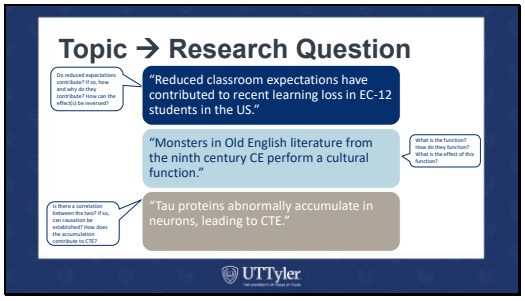


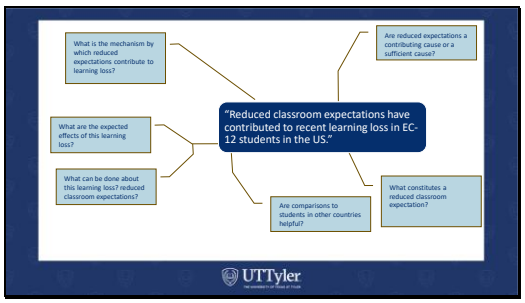
In the previous session, we left off with the idea that a focused topic is something that *generates* questions.

Slide 9



In fact, even if you know nothing about these topics, I bet you could come up with a question that isn't obvious or easily answerable.

Slide 10



Good, focused topics almost generate questions by themselves: they lead a curious person to ask questions that don't have easy or obvious answers—questions that no one else might have asked before. Since you're a researcher (and therefore a curious person), a focused topic will set you up nicely.

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Later in the session, we cover how a RQ helps direct your research, but I want to focus on giving your research purpose here.

All research has the same general purpose: to solve a problem. The problem is almost always the same, too: ignorance. So what you're doing as a researcher is *creating new knowledge*.

However, the more nuanced purpose of research can be different:

- Sometimes (as in literary studies) the purpose is that general: we want to know something new
- Sometimes (as in medicine or business) the purpose is more practical: we want to improve patient health—or the ROI of a business.

If you can think of your research as solving a problem, you're going to be better off and likely more motivated.

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Slide 13

Some think of Research Questions as reporter's questions, but no. High-level research uses specific kinds of questions.

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These are the 6 kinds of Research Questions

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Questions of Fact are true/false or yes/no: "Is it true/extant/real?"

Does the Havana Syndrome exist or is it misidentified symptoms of other problems?
Did Marie Antoinette really say "let them eat cake"?

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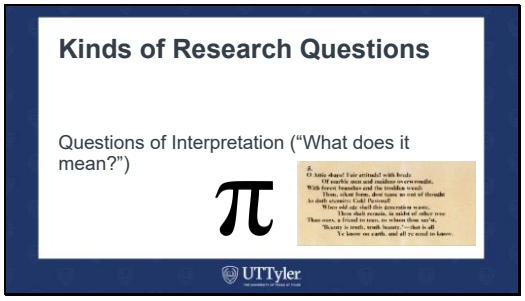
Questions of Definition are about the definition/composition/categorization of something: "What is it?"

What is the difference between art and pornography? (Potter Stewart, *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 378 U.S. 184 (1964))?
Is a platypus (an egg-laying animal) a mammal?

Slide 17



Questions of Interpretation are about nuances and implication: "What does it mean?"

We can know pi is 3.1415…, which is a **Question of Fact**, but asking a **Question of Interpretation** is understanding that it is a ratio of c. to d. that allows finding the area and/or perimeter of a circle, or that it's transcendental.

We can all read the last two lines of Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn," but it is hard to know what the final line means since it could be the urn or the poet speaking.

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Questions of Value are about judgement: “Is it good or bad?”

Is AI good for humans or bad for us?

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Questions of Consequence are about the effects of something: “What will happen?”

What happens to human physiology when in space for extended periods of time?

What are the effects of a low-fat/high-sugar diet?

Note that **Questions of Consequence** are not necessarily **Questions of Value**. The consequence might be good or bad, but that value of that effect isn’t necessarily something the researcher is interested in.

Slide 20

Questions of Policy are about future actions: "What should be done?"

Should grades be abolished?

Should the minimum wage be raised?

They often implicitly or explicitly include **Questions of Value** and **Questions of Consequence**.

Slide 21

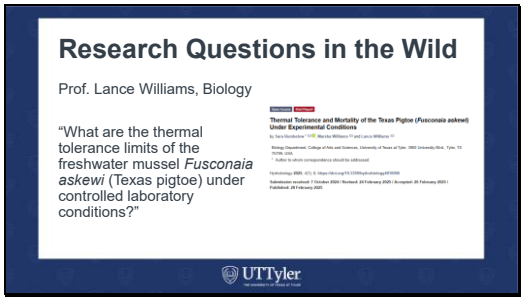
These 6 kinds of questions asked are field-specific.

Chemists might argue over the **Definition** of an ion, but not its **Value** (Is an ion good?).

Literary critics might research the **Interpretation** of the economy in *The Hunger Games*, but not **Policy** (Should we base our economy on *The Hunger Games*?).

Slide 22

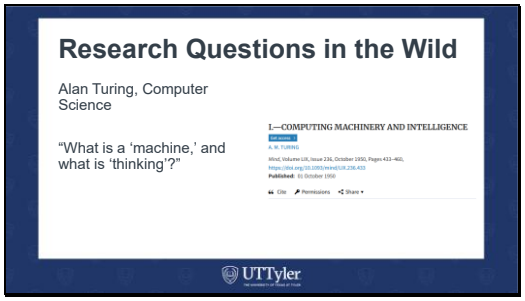
Slide 23



For Biology, Prof. Williams asks a **Question of Fact**: "Which temperature is the thermal tolerance?

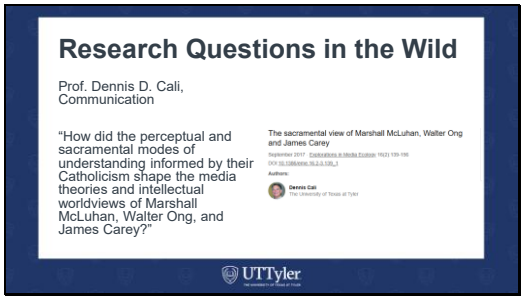
Larger research projects can include a number of different kinds of questions: later in the paper, we see a **Question of Consequence** and a **Question of Policy** regarding climate change and the mussel.

Slide 24



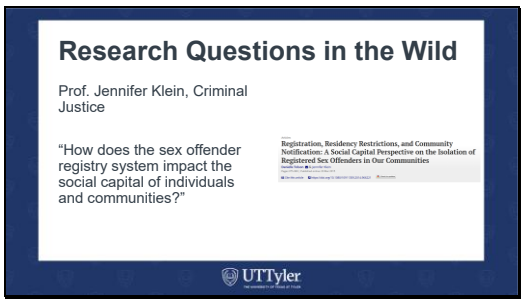
For Computer Science/Engineering, Alan Turing asked A **Question of Definition** for the ages: "What does and does not belong to the category 'machine'?" and "What is 'thinking'?"

Slide 25



For Communication, Prof. Cali asks a **Question of Interpretation**: "How do we interpret the worldviews of these three thinkers in light of their Catholic influences?"

Slide 26



For Criminal Justice, Prof. Klein asks a **Question of Consequence**: What is the effect of the sex registry?

This research also implies a **Question of Value** and a **Question of Policy.**

Slide 27

Slide 28

Crafting a research question is actually a 3-step process of combining these elements: topic, a basic question, and significance/impact.

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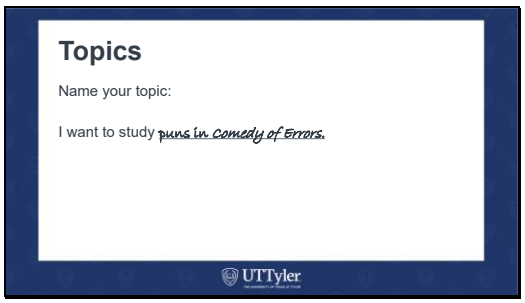
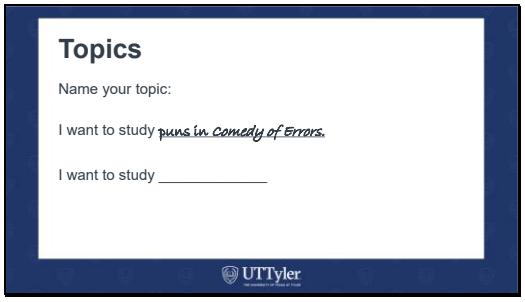


Research questions come out of a focused topic, as we saw earlier.

This is my research topic.

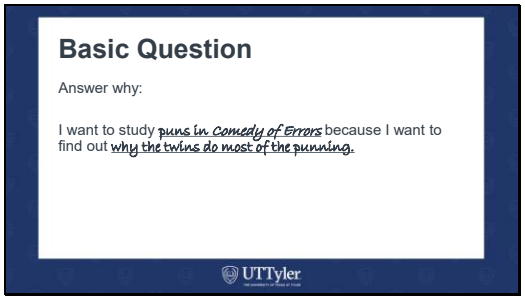
Slide 30



Now, you.

Think about the research topic that you are working on (the narrower, the better).

Slide 31



The next step is to explain why you want to study it and what you hope to find out.

This is what I want to find out in my research.

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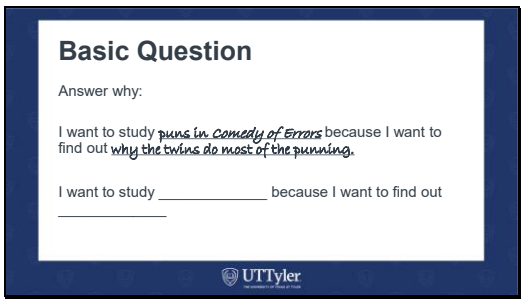
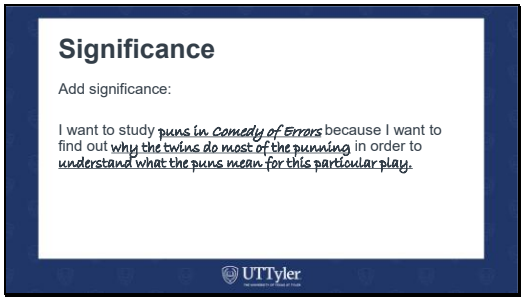


Now you. Why do you want to study this topic? What do you hope to find out?

Slide 33



Last is the significance/impact. What would be the impact of your study?

This is mine. It is literary studies, so my impact is going to be conceptual, though in many fields the impact will be practical.

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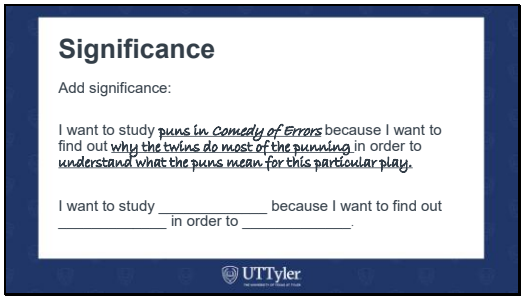

What would be the impact of your study?

Does it produce knowledge (conceptual) or does it address a problem in practice (practical)?

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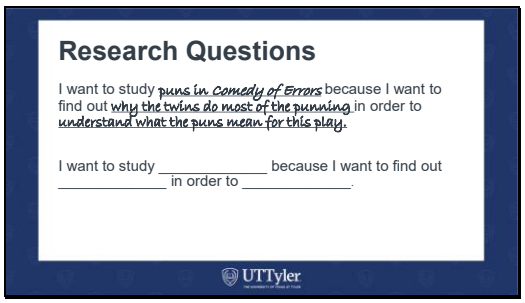

When you combine this all together, you have an implied research question already. It just isn't articulated in the form of a question.

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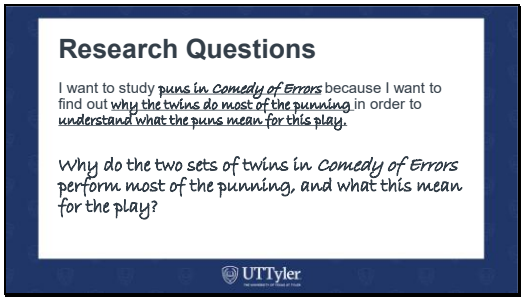

The basic question and the significance combine to form the research question.

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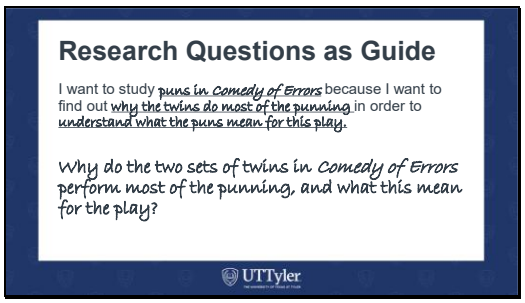
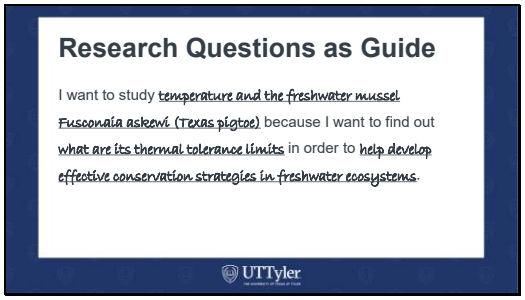
Slide 38



My research question shown here will act as a guide as I do my research. *I always ask myself as I research, "what does this have to do with my question?"*

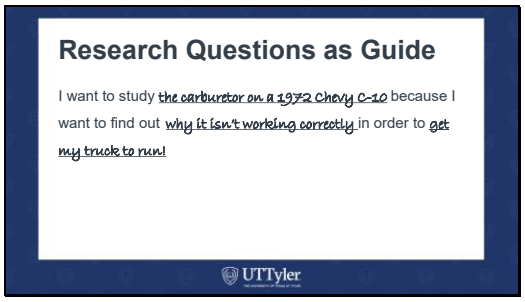
If, as it has, a good deal of my time is spent trying to understand the linguistic mechanism of punning, I must know why. If I cannot articulate why I am studying it, I am likely wasting time and effort. (In this case, the **Question of Definition**, "What is a pun?" is an important building block for my research question.)

Slide 39



This process works for something as complicated and academic as Dr. Williams's study…

Slide 40



…or as simple and practical as fixing a car.

The takeaway is that if the process can work on puns in Shakespeare, experiments on mussels, and engine repair, *then the process can be applied to any research situation*.

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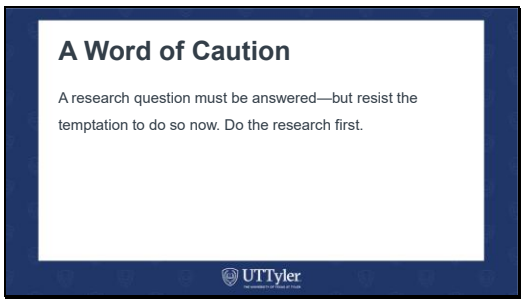

Please understand that the research you perform answers the research question. You can have a hypothetical answer early on, but stay open-minded. Let your good faith research/data show you where to go.

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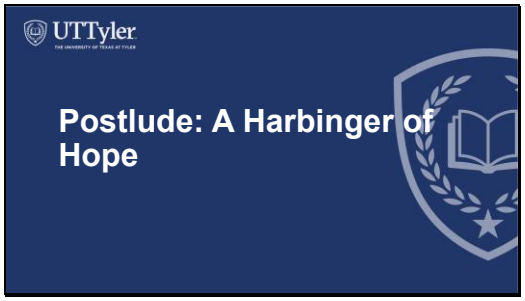

Return to my story:

That first year I worked on my diss. was horrific. The only way any good comes out of it is if it can function as a cautionary tale *for you*. Do not do what I did. Spend the time at the beginning of the process to craft a good research question.

Remember: the question you ask greatly impacts the sort of answer you will get. *Ask a bad question, get a bad answer; ask a good question, get a good answer.*