



Asking the right questions

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What's the idea?

It's important to develop well-formulated and answerable questions when you start to look at research so that you use your time efficiently.

What does it mean?

The right question helps you to:

- » develop effective search strategies
- » focus on evidence that directly addresses your needs
- » communicate more clearly with colleagues when requesting support and guidance.

PICOT is one of the most well-known structures to help you develop questions. PICOT is often used in medical and healthcare settings, so we have adapted it for you here:

Pupils/problem. How would you describe the challenge or pupils you are trying to help?

Intervention. What are you planning to do?

Comparison. What is the alternative to your intervention?

Outcomes. What are the desired effects of the intervention?

Time. How long does it take for intervention to achieve the desired outcomes?

What are the implications for teachers?

Consider how the **PICOT** structure applies to the examples outlined below.

Example 1:

Your year 6 pupils require literacy support and you think assigning an education assistant who specialises in literacy to co-plan with the teacher might be an effective intervention. But how does this option compare to your usual practice? You want the outcome to improve pupils' literacy within a six-week timeframe.

Does assigning an education assistant specialising in literacy to co-plan lessons with the teacher (I) improve literacy (O) in pupils in

year 6 (P) within six weeks (T) when compared to students whose teacher did not co-plan lessons with an education assistant (C)?

Example 2:

Your year 10 pupils are not acting on feedback in mathematics. You are thinking about an intervention where you ask pupils to have another go at answers before they receive their mark, but you want to know if this is more effective compared with your usual practice. The outcome is to increase their knowledge over one term.

Does encouraging students in year 10 (P) to have another go at answering a question (I) improve Maths outcomes (O) over one term (T) when compared to standard Maths teaching (C)?

Once you have developed your **PICOT** question, you can start to devise a search strategy about what evidence to look at.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- » Willingham D (2012) *When Can You Trust the Experts: How to Tell Good Science from Bad in Education*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- » Denyer D and Tranfield D (2009) Producing a Systematic Review. In: Buchanan D and Bryman A (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Organisational Research Methods*. London: SAGE, pp. 671–689.
- » Straus S, Glasziou P, Richardson S and Haynes B (2011) *Evidence-Based Medicine: How to Practice and Teach it*. (4th ed). Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, Elsevier.