

Undergraduate Research Center Workshop: Moving from Topics to Questions

	Examples	Your questions
Ask about the topic's context and history	What came before masks? How were masks invented? Why? What might come next? How have Halloween masks changed? How has the role of masks in US culture changed? How have masks helped make Halloween a major holiday?	
Ask about the topic's structure and composition	How do masks reflect the values of different societies and cultures? What role do masks play in Hopi dances? How are masks used?	
Ask how your topic is categorized	What are the different kinds of masks? How are they categorized by use? By appearance? By geography or society?	
Ask negative questions in addition to positive ones	Why have masks <i>not</i> become a part of other holidays, like President's Day? How do Native American masks <i>not</i> differ from those in Africa? What parts of masks are typically <i>not</i> significant in religious ceremonies?	
Ask <i>what if</i> and other speculative questions	What if no one ever wore masks except for safety? What if everyone wore masks in public? What if it were customary to wear masks on blind dates? Why are masks common in African religions but not in Western ones?	
Ask questions that build on agreement with your research (sources)	Elias shows that masked balls became popular in 19 th -century London in response to anxieties about social mobility. Did the same anxieties cause similar developments in Venice? Elias supports his claim with published sources. Is it also supported by letters and diaries?	
Ask questions that reflect disagreement with your research	Martinez claims that carnival masks uniquely allow wearers to escape social norms. But could there be a larger pattern of all masks creating a sense of alternative forms of social or spiritual life?	

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