

# Wisdom of the Crowd: Asking Questions to the Scientific Community

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We all have preferred sources of assistance we turn to when we are stumped by a question. Some people reach out to a dependable mentor or trusted group of colleagues; others query an email listserv or pose their question at a conference. But when those avenues aren't available or you're interested in reaching a larger audience, consider options for crowd-sourcing answers for your question. Some crowd-sourcing platforms take on any topic, while others are dedicated to domain-specific areas of knowledge. Below we review several platforms and suggest use-cases for each one.

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## Quora

Quora is an online platform for users to pose questions on any topic and people weigh in with responses. The content is mainly moderated by the users, who can rank answers by up-voting helpful answers and down-voting those that seem less helpful. Users can report plagiarism, harassment, or factually incorrect materials. They can also suggest edits to the original author of the question or answer, which can be approved or rejected.

**Example question:** What is the loudest sound or noise in the world?

**When to use:** Good for science-related questions that encourage narrative-like answers and appeal to academics and the general public.

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## ResearchGate

Though ResearchGate has many controversial practices (such as ongoing problems with copyright infringement, or taking advantage of user-curated metadata without making it openly available) they do offer a question and answer platform that is highly popular with researchers. ResearchGate administrators moderate content and provide minor edits to questions and answers. Users are able to report inappropriate content, and they can recommend questions and answers which makes those items more visible overall.

**Example question:** Can anyone suggest where I might find information regarding the approval process for cell substrates for clinical use?

**When to use:** Good for deeper-level science questions with answers not easily found online, and should appeal to the academic research audience.

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## Stack Overflow

Stack Overflow is a platform for users to ask and answer questions related to computer programming. Users can earn reputation points by receiving up-votes from other users for helpful answers. The content is moderated mostly by users, though Stack Overflow moderators will step in to suspend users who exhibit disruptive behavior. Another Q&A platform option for IT-related questions is Experts Exchange.

**Example question:** How do I [write web scraping results to a .txt file](#)?

**When to use:** Good for very specific coding problems for major computer programming languages (such as Java, Python, C#). Usually the question asker provides the problematic code snippet for those working on the answer to review.

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## SEQanswers

SEQanswers is an active online forum for the next generation sequencing community, though any scientific topic related to genomics is welcome. Anyone can freely visit the site and post messages on the forum. Moderators do review content and will provide direct edits as needed. They also reserve the right to remove users or delete threads if they identify inappropriate behavior. Registered vendors are allowed to promote their product and services.

**Example question:** How to evaluate the polymerase read and subread statistics from the raw data?

**When to use:** Good for specific questions on next generation sequencing or broader questions on genomics that appeal to the scientific audience.

If you have a question and don't know where to find some assistance, consider contacting your [Liaison Librarian](#), who can connect you with resources on campus, or help you search for information online.

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Printed: Monday, September 18, 2023 10:38 AM

