

Finding a Focus in your Writing

Avoiding statements that are too broad or too narrow will help focus your writing on an idea that you can develop further into a paragraph or essay. A statement that is too broad offers too many possibilities to easily manage in a single paragraph or short essay. A statement that is too narrow is limited because it does not contain enough information or is too specific to develop further.

Consider the following examples:

Too broad: There are many interesting countries in the world.

Better: Italy is a popular country for international tourists, and many travelers visit its museums and historical sites.

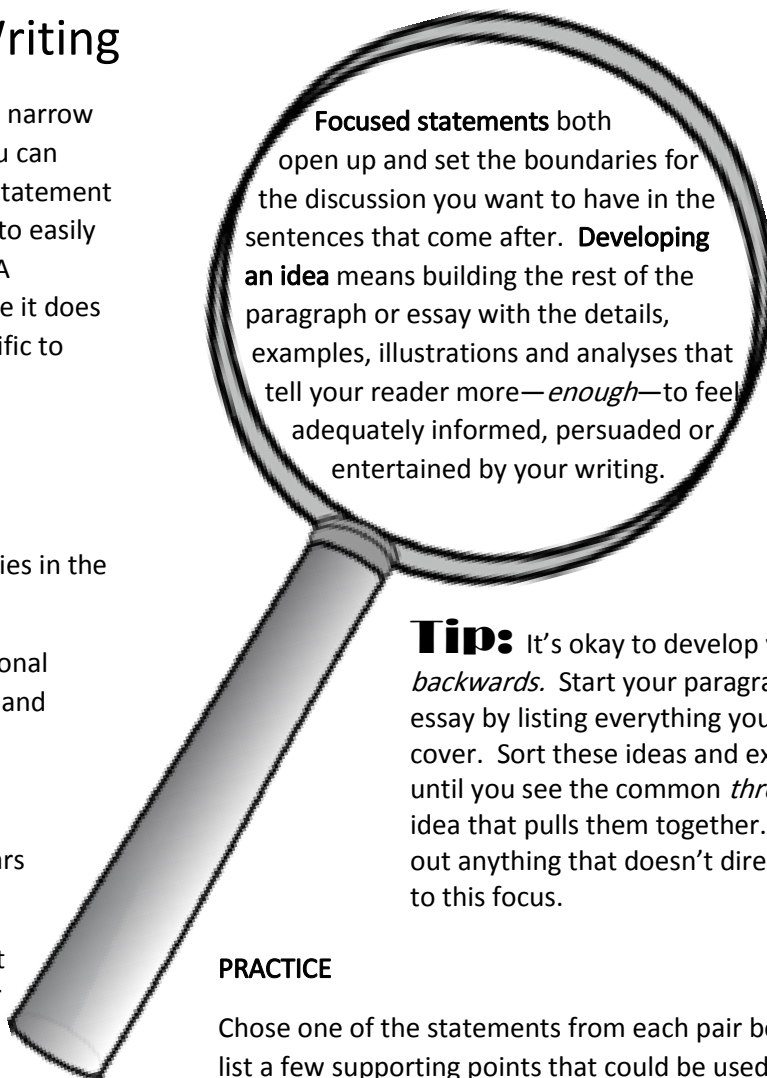
Too Narrow: I have a brother who is three years younger than me.

Better: My younger brother knows a lot about computers, and he has fixed several computer problems for relatives.

PRACTICE

Evaluate each of the following statements. Decide whether each is too broad, too narrow, or 'just right' for developing into a paragraph or short essay.

1. My cousin has a Golden Retriever named Sam.
2. Golden Retrievers make great family pets for several reasons.
3. There are important points to consider when planning a vacation.
4. Taking a vacation is fun.
5. Ethnic foods are delicious.
6. There are several vegetarian Indian dishes that are delicious.
7. XYZ Auto Parts is a great place to shop for a car battery since they are currently running a half-off coupon.
8. The battery in my car died today.



Focused statements both open up and set the boundaries for the discussion you want to have in the sentences that come after. **Developing an idea** means building the rest of the paragraph or essay with the details, examples, illustrations and analyses that tell your reader more—*enough*—to feel adequately informed, persuaded or entertained by your writing.

Tip: It's okay to develop your focus *backwards*. Start your paragraph or essay by listing everything you want to cover. Sort these ideas and examples until you see the common *thread* or idea that pulls them together. Leave out anything that doesn't directly relate to this focus.

PRACTICE

Chose one of the statements from each pair below and list a few supporting points that could be used to develop the idea further into an essay.

1. I enjoy taking math classes for several reasons.
2. I received an "A" in my Algebra class last semester.

Supporting points:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

1. Exercise takes time.
2. Training to run a marathon should be done in several stages.

Supporting points:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____