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.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_