

## WRITING CENTER

### Tips on Focus

Perhaps one of the hardest things to do as a writer is to establish a clear focus. Using a problem-solving approach can help you to explore a problem, narrow it, and arrive at a thesis.

#### Establishing Your Purpose

Good writing is interesting to the reader and accomplishes something for the author. To establish purpose, ask the following questions:

- What is the purpose of the piece? Does it show, establish, explain, describe, prove... ?
- What point does the paper make?
- Why is it important?

#### Relating Purpose to Audience

How will reading your paper change what your audience thinks, feels, or knows about the topic?

#### Problem Analysis

When you have a general assignment in which you have been asked to focus on a problem of your choice, performing a problem analysis will help you to narrow and establish a thesis.

##### **Define the conflict or key issue.**

Most real-world problems represent a conflict between two goods or between the conflicting needs of two groups. Real problems are complex and difficult to solve without some compromise.

##### **Place the problem in a larger context.**

Step back and give yourself a broader view by considering the social, political, economic, historical, or legal setting.

##### **Make your problem definition specific and concrete.**

Explore the constituent parts of the problem. Break it up into manageable parts.

##### **Come to an open-minded conclusion.**

Show your reader that you have seriously considered the alternatives, recognized the implications of your position, and have taken a reasoned but solid stand.

#### Establishing a Thesis

Once you have defined and explored your problem, you will have the information you need to make an assertion about the topic. A strong thesis is one that makes an assertion and then defends it with reason and evidence. Theses can take different forms:

- Theses that assert that a problem exists
- Theses that assert a hypothesis or new understanding of the problem.
- Theses that assert a solution to the problem.

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Information from Linda Flower's Problem Solving Strategies for Writing. 4th ed. N.Y.: Harcourt, 1993.