

Finding a Purpose

From the preliminary plans that I have seen, I see that most of you are struggling with the notion of purpose. This is crucial to a successful essay: You must write a clear, sharp, well-focused purpose statement, something that you can fully address in such a short text.

Changing your topic will not help you find a proper purpose. You have to change the way that you think about your essay and the writing task.

Maybe the following exchange will help you see what I mean. No matter what your topic, you can find a sufficiently narrow, well-focused purpose that you can properly address in a short five-paragraph essay.

One

here's the idea I had for my essay. I didn't write the content yet, even though I have a good idea of what it is going to be, because I wanted to have your comments about my subject first. I it too general?

Audience: Parents of child and teenagers

Purpose: Show them that it is important to learn an other or many languages

Persona: A university student, studying in translation, who wished have had learn more languages earlier

Context: It is a lot easier and faster to learn an other language at a young age and the parents are the ones in charge of their children education at that moment.

Content:

Strategies: Anecdote, cause and effect, explanation

One, response

Well, that's a big goal to accomplish in what equates to a 6 or 7 minute speech. The problem with such big goals is that writer's end up stating obvious generalities.

Moreover, the myth that you state as context (which is not even the context but part of the content) is a predictable point under such a big goal and really is just a myth. In fact, teenagers and adults have many advantages in learning skills and language acquisition. The only advantage for prepubescent children in learning a language is that they may acquire a native-like accent. But grammar, vocabulary, fluency, rate of acquisition – young children have absolutely no real advantage in the aspects.

I would suggest that you reconsider your purpose. Narrow it. Do not use any vague words in stating it (such as “important” – that could mean so many things, and does not give you a clear goal or purpose to write towards).

Further thoughts:

I wonder why you confuse “context” with content or perhaps even purpose. Your statement under “context” might be made into a purpose – but NOT one that you could or should adopt for this essay – by adding “to show . . .”. Context refers to the circumstances in which a text appears. A seminar, a conference, a magazine, a professional journal, a newsletter for a community organization – those are examples of context (generally speaking).

We are not dealing with context much for this essay, but it should be vaguely “academic”, as in not journalistic or whatever. Actually, that parameter is not even graded this time around, so you do have some flexibility. You can use that flexibility best if you understand what might constitute a proper context.

Two

I've been trying to change my purpose, but everything I come up with is too big or too general. Would it be better if I tried this other idea I had? I'm not sure if it's also not specific enough.

Audience: People who are looking for a diet

Purpose: Why you shouldn't choose a vegan diet
Persona: an active young adult who has tried vegetarianism
Content: - disprove big known "facts" about vegetarianism
 - disadvantages of vegetarianism
 - advantages of eating meat in an active lifestyle
Context: Article in a health or beauty magazine
Strategies: point and counter-point, examples, cause and effect,

Two, response

Yeah, this part is definitely the most difficult part of the writing process – the planning.

But changing your topic completely does not really help you develop your skill in focusing and narrowing your purpose properly.

As it happens, your ideas about veganism might work better, yet still needs some work. Even so, I will offer some other ideas about language learning to demonstrate a more feasible purpose.

Same audience. Possible purposes (you would choose just one):

- explain two or three of the challenges that young children face in learning a foreign language
- give some tips for helping a child learn a language
- explain two or three social advantages that a bilingual child might have (this would apply only to a place with more than one language, like Montreal)

See? Something just more specific, some workable in relatively few words.

Back to veganism: You still state your purpose in broad terms – “why you should not choose a vegan diet”. Well, that statement cannot possibly be answered in detail in less than 1000 words. At any rate, a much longer, more in depth discussion would be possible. The generality of your plan is even more evident in your content, any one point there could be at least a 20-page chapter in a book. As I said, changing your topic does not address your real problem.

You simply have to decide on a purpose statement that you can fully address in five paragraphs, about the same as a 7-minute speech.

Possibilities (choose ONE):

- what nutrition you get from meat (but not from veggies)
- what nutrition you do not get from veggies
- two or three common myths about vegetariansim
- the nutritional advantages of meat (with no reference to veggies)

Something like. Make it all easier on yourself. Write a simple, well-focused purpose statement that you can fully accomplish in a short essay.

Hope that helps!