

SHARED CRITERIA

Focus: “What is the point of this paper, and who would want to read it?”

What a focus IS NOT

A focus

- is not merely staying on topic. A focus is what your paper claims or does with the topic.
- is not simply having a thesis sentence in your introduction. A focus should determine practically everything throughout your paper.
- is not just writing on something that interests you. Your focus should be one that matters to a particular audience.

What a focus IS

A focus

- is having a clear central purpose. While there can be many reasons for writing a paper, one major reason should control the entire paper. Readers should not have to guess what your “real” purpose is.
- is manageable given the situation in which you as a writer are placed. A focus should not be too broad or ambitious given the length of your paper. A focus is specific enough so that you can thoroughly cover it.
- is important for a particular audience. The purpose and point of your paper should interest your readers and should be relevant to them.

Development & Support: “What information, ideas, and reasoning does the paper provide to achieve its purpose?”

What development & support IS NOT

Development & support

- is not just expressing your opinion or how you feel.
- is not simply giving details. Use details that matter most to your audience and focus.
- is not merely rewording and repeating your major claim.

What development & support IS

Development & support

- is offering information and logic that best clarify or defend your focus.
- is asking, “Would my readers accept each idea, or should I add support?”
- is moving toward specifics rather than generalizations.

Organization: “Are there clear, logical connection between sentences and between paragraphs, and is there an overall sense of order for the paper?”

What organization IS NOT

Organization

- is a matter of wording and arranging sentences in such a way that they clearly connect not only with one another but also with your focus.
- is built around how paragraphs are logically sequenced. If you could switch around most of your paragraphs in almost any order, that is a sign they do not really build on one another.
- is largely built around paragraphs that are unified. That is, each paragraph is devoted to one major claim, point, or idea—each going back to your focus.

Mechanics: “Do my language, spelling, and punctuation choices adhere to what people expect in formal writing?”

What mechanics IS NOT

Mechanics

- is not a small problem. Mechanical errors create confusion; they also cause readers to doubt your credibility and your argument.
- is not the only problem. A paper can be mechanically perfect but ineffective by being boring, illogical, or unclear.
- is not something that computerized spell-checkers and grammar-checkers are sophisticated enough to handle alone.

What mechanics IS

Mechanics

- is something to keep in mind while drafting a paper, but it is also a proofreading matter done at the end of the writing process. Writing is too complex to do everything at once.
- is something that all readers—not just educators—use to evaluate writing.
- is often a matter of choices rather than rules. Sometimes you have to consider your audience and situation more than a book of rules.