

## Journalism/Creative Writing Extended Project Non-Fiction Track

### Step Three: Author's Purpose

Before we get too much further, I want to take a day where you think about your purpose in writing this story. We want this story to be well-crafted, not just thrown together because we think writing is fun. To do this, we're going to think through *why* you're writing and *how* you're going to communicate your purpose to the reader through theme.

Don't let the academic-sounding term throw you off. The "theme" of a story simply refers to its main topic or central idea. I suppose the major theme of a given work is the sum of all its ideas. Whether you like it or not, your story has a theme, because all stories ultimately have one major idea. This is because we as writers are fueled by ideas.

Before you even begin work on your story, you should identify what your story's theme is. Ask yourself what, underneath all of your interviews and facts, is your story really about. Is it a story about how love conquers all? Is it about the complicated relationship between mothers and daughters? Good versus evil is a common theme. Is your story about how evil never triumphs and good always wins? Is it about how evil triumphs despite good? Is it about the importance of truth? Any of these make excellent examples of themes. Of course, your story may have more than one theme. But you should at least identify one "main theme," or major idea, that your story will focus on.

While experts differ on the specific approach reporters should take to news stories today, all agree you should be able to identify the main point of your story before you can write it. Use these two steps to do that:

1. Ask yourself "So what?" or "What's this about?" or "What's my point?" while considering the information you have gathered.
2. Write the answer or answers to these questions in one sentence at the top of your page as you work. This one sentence will guide you as you write.

Once you have identified your main point, you can consider your story's organization. You'll want to keep this main point, this theme, at the top of mind as you work.

#### **How to weave the theme into your story**

A solidly presented theme will emerge through many different facets of your story. Start thinking about how your theme will become apparent to your readers. Some of these ways include:

- Through interviews
- Through symbolic use of the environment
- Through repeating ideas
- Through highlighting symbols or landmarks
- Through contrasting values

Think through your current outline and ideas. Then think of your main theme (sum of all your ideas). How are you going to get your point across? Think through some of options and make some notes of ways you can incorporate different tools to get your theme across throughout your story.