# Focusing and Planning for the Recommendation Report

In order to keep your recommendation report to a reasonable length, select a narrow topic. Twelve pages is a maximum not a minimum. For example: Rather than proposing to improve computer ergonomics, you might examine rearranging a computer keyboard. Ideas and plans may change as you do your research—that's fine. Answer the following questions to help narrow and focus your report:

## The Set Up

- **Who are you solving the problem for?** Who are your primary and secondary audiences?

- **What is your specific purpose?** What do you want the reader to do with this information?

- **What context considerations must you keep in mind?** The economy? The local culture? The political climate? and so on . . .

- **What problem will you address?** Example: The QWERTY keyboard really slows down typing on a keyboard.

- **What has caused this problem?** Example: The QWERTY keyboard uses awkward placement of the most common letters.

- **What is the relevant history? What options should you not retry?** Example: Typewriter engineers wanted to find a way to slow typists down to prevent the keys sticking together.

## The Decision Process

- **What are the minimum specifications that will help you narrow down the options you will examine?** Minimum specifications are requirements. You will only examine an option if it meets the min specs. Make sure to express min specs in terms of limits or absolutes. Example: The option must use the Arabic alphabet; it must allow at least 60 wpm; it must use the same shift procedures . . .

- **What solutions or options do you plan to examine (as determined by the minimum specifications (below)?** Select three comparable options. In other words don't try to compare a Dodge minivan to a Maserati.

- **What evaluative criteria will help you make your final selection?** Evaluative criteria are preferences. Your group will describe what the ideal would be for each criterion. Evaluative criteria may overlap with minimum specifications as long as you express the min specs as limits and the criteria as preferences. Example: The

camera must cost less than $300 (min spec). We will give preference to the least expensive camera (evaluative criteria).

Use superlative phrasing for your evaluative criteria (the most . . ., the least . . ., the smallest . . ., the fastest . . .)

- **Some common criteria include the following:**
  - Definitions (intro material or glossary)
  - Cost
  - Work schedule
  - Personnel needed
  - Sustainability (energy savings, reduced pollution, reuse potential, etc.)
  - Materials required
  - Ease of use or implementation
  - Unique features
  - Measurements, weight, other specs

Remember, categories such as quality, ease of use, ergonomics, durability will require **specific definitions and most likely subcriteria**. These terms mean different things to different people.

**Criteria to avoid** include the following:
- Appearance/aesthetics
- Taste
- Smell
- Any other subjective category

- **What problems do you anticipate with your solution(s) and what will you do to mitigate them or show that they are not important enough to change your recommendation?**

## Other Considerations for Selecting and Narrowing a Topic

- **What visuals do you plan to use?** (minimum of 2)

- **What type of research will you do in each of the following categories?**
  Empirical (minimum 4 sources)
  Print (minimum 2 scholarly sources)
  Electronic (minimum 2 sources)

Remember your plans may change as you do your research and writing. Come and see me if you are considering making substantial changes to your outline.