Identifying an issue

There are many issues facing Australia today. Issues are subjects that need to be discussed and thought about within our Australian community. Essentially issues are broad debates in the community that need to be resolved.

For example, one on-going issue is the euthanasia* debate. This issue involves people who are very sick, usually with a terminal illness, and in extreme pain. To ease their own terrible suffering they decide that they want to end their own life. Often they need to do this with the help of doctors or others. Today it is illegal to help someone commit suicide in this situation. There is much debate about the issue. There are strong arguments from many perspectives.

*Euthanasia – bringing about, in a deliberate way, the death of a person who is suffering from an incurable condition and who is in a great deal of pain.

Expressing the issue as a question

To make better sense of current issues such as euthanasia it is a good idea to pose a question that needs resolution. Expressing issues as a question suggests they will in some way be answered.

For example, in the case of the euthanasia debate the issue could be expressed as one of the following questions:

• How should society deal with terminally ill patients who wish to have an assisted suicide?
• What should society do about terminally ill patients who wish to have an assisted suicide?

You will notice that these questions cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. These are open-ended questions and use What ... or How ... at the beginning. They encourage people to debate the issue, or present a particular viewpoint. Questions such as these also encourage some resolution or suggestion about how the problem can be solved or addressed.