Evaluate Your Ideas to Narrow the Focus

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

• Learn how to use idea evaluation questions to narrow the focus for writing a persuasive letter.
• Work with a partner to evaluate their own ideas using the questions.
• Discuss the strategy and how they can use it in their own writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed

• Chart paper and markers
• Persuasive Letter Ideas Evaluation Chart (BLM 2)
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the Persuasive Letter Ideas Evaluation chart onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson.

Explain the Process

Say: When writers brainstorm, we list many ideas that we could write about. But before we begin to write, we need to narrow our focus. We can do that by asking ourselves questions so we can use our answers to help us decide. We use different questions for different genres. When it comes to evaluating our ideas for a persuasive letter, what kinds of questions do you think we might want to ask ourselves? (Allow responses.) Remember, in order to write an effective persuasive letter, we need to make sure we feel strongly about the topic of our letter.

Model Evaluating Your Ideas to Narrow the Focus

Display a Persuasive Letter Ideas Evaluation chart like the one shown here on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Read aloud each evaluation question. Use the sample persuasive letter ideas on the chart or substitute ideas of your own to model thinking aloud to narrow the focus.

### Ideas for a Persuasive Letter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas for a Persuasive Letter</th>
<th>Do I feel strongly about this idea?</th>
<th>Is this a good idea or a silly idea?</th>
<th>Can I find enough facts to support my idea?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>afternoon snacks at school</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>good</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a swimming pool for our neighborhood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>later bedtime on school nights</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample Persuasive Letter Ideas Evaluation Chart (BLM 2)

Read aloud first evaluation question. Say: It’s very important that I feel strongly about a topic in order to write a persuasive letter about it. My first idea is about afternoon snacks. I have a strong opinion on this, so I think I could write a good letter about why we should have a snack time every afternoon, provided it’s a healthy one. I’m going to write “yes” for my answer to this question. If my answer to this question had been “no,” should I choose this idea to write about? (Allow students to respond.) No, if I don’t feel strongly about the idea, I won’t be able to write a persuasive argument about it.

Read aloud second evaluation question. Say: I don’t think this idea is silly at all! We have an early lunchtime and we often get really hungry in the afternoon. It’s hard to work and to think when your stomach is growling and you’re wishing for a snack. My answer to the second question is that this is definitely a good idea.
Read aloud third evaluation question. **Say:** I know I’ll need to include facts in my letter on how important afternoon snacks are. I can talk about how much energy they give us and how they could help us concentrate better on what we’re learning. I’m sure I could find examples to explain how a snack time could be added without using up too much time. I’m going to answer “yes” to this question.

Continue modeling how to evaluate your ideas as time allows. Make sure to include some “no” answers so students understand how to narrow their ideas.

Explain that as students evaluate ideas, they might end up with two or more ideas in which they have answered “yes” to the questions. If this happens, encourage students to use the following questions to help them choose between the ideas:

- Which idea is most important to persuade people about?
- Which idea would have the biggest effect if people were persuaded?

### 2. Rehearse

**Practice Narrowing the Focus**

Invite students to work with a small group of classmates to apply the evaluation questions on the chart to one idea or two of their ideas for a persuasive letter. If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

**Share Ideas**

Bring students back together. Invite volunteers to share an idea from their chart and tell how using the questions helped them determine if it would make a good topic for a persuasive letter.

### 3. Independent Writing and Conferring

**Say:** We just learned some questions we can ask to help us narrow our focus for a persuasive letter. Use this strategy during independent writing time to help you evaluate other ideas you have brainstormed.

Make BLM 2 available to students who are ready to select an idea for their persuasive letters during independent writing time. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

### 4. Share

Bring the class together. Invite any students who have finished evaluating their ideas to share the topics they have chosen for their persuasive letters.

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### Strategies to Support ELs

**Beginning**

Work individually with beginning students to help them answer the evaluation questions on the chart.

**Intermediate and Advanced**

Display the following sentence frames on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Model how students will use them as they evaluate their idea with a partner during “Practice Narrowing the Focus.”

- I have/do not have a strong opinion about _____.
- I think this is/is not a good idea because _____.
- Some examples to support this idea are _____.

**All Levels**

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: **opinion/**la opinión; **persuade/**persuadir.