Evaluate Your Ideas to Narrow the Focus

1. Focus

Explain the Process of Narrowing Ideas

Say: Brainstorming is the time when we generate as many ideas as we can, but then we need to narrow our focus before we can write. We need one good idea, and we need to feel very committed to our idea. Today we’re going to learn about using evaluation questions to narrow our focus to one idea for an informational report.

Model Evaluating Ideas to Narrow Your Focus

Display an informational report ideas evaluation chart like this one on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Read aloud each evaluation question. Use the sample informational report ideas on the chart or list ideas of your own to model how you narrow your topics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas for Writing an Informational Report</th>
<th>Do I like this topic as a writing idea?</th>
<th>Do I know enough about this idea to get started?</th>
<th>Do I want to learn more about this topic?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fireflies</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cotton candy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>giraffes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mountain bikes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample Informational Report Ideas Evaluation Chart (BLM 2)

After first question. Say: When I was a child, I used to catch fireflies in the summertime. My cousins and I would chase them in the evenings and try to catch them in a jar. When we did, we’d be amazed at how their bodies would light up! I think fireflies would be a lot of fun to write a report about. I’ll write “yes” in the first column. What if I’d decided that I didn’t like this idea anymore and wrote “no”? Would this be a good topic for me to write about? (Allow responses.) Probably not! If I’m no longer interested in an idea, it’s not a good choice for a report. If that happened, I would move on to the next idea.

After second question. Say: I do know a little about fireflies. I know that they are also called lightning bugs. My grandma called them that. She said that before they change into fireflies, they look like worms, but they can still glow. Many people call them glow worms then. I also know that fireflies are only found in warm places. Yes, I think I know enough to get started on a report about this topic. I’ll write “yes” for this question, too.

After third question. Say: I do want to learn more about this topic. I’ve had a lot of questions about fireflies for a long time. Finding out more about them...
would be a lot of fun and very interesting to me. That’s going to make writing the report a lot easier! I’ll write “yes” to the last question, too.

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 of these ideas will help me write a report that I would read myself?
- Which of these ideas is the topic that’s most important for people to know about?

2. Rehearse

Practice Evaluating Ideas to Narrow Your Focus

Invite students to work with a partner to apply the evaluation questions on the chart to one idea they have for an informational report. If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Ideas

Bring students together and invite volunteers to share an idea they evaluated and how they answered the questions. Ask students to comment on how the evaluation process worked for them and to suggest other questions they might consider in the future.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning
Work individually with beginning ELs to answer the questions on the chart.

Intermediate
Write and model the following sentence frames that students will need as they evaluate their idea with a partner:
- I like/I do not like ______.
- I know/I do not know enough about ______.
- I want/I do not want to learn more about ______.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned a strategy for narrowing our focus for writing an informational report. We used an evaluation chart and asked questions about the topic. You can use the same kind of a chart as you evaluate the rest of your report ideas during independent writing time. Choosing the best topic from those you brainstormed is an important part of being a good writer.

Make BLM 2 available to students who are ready to select their informational report topics 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 students together. Invite students who have finished evaluating their ideas to share the informational report topics they have chosen.