Evaluate Ideas to Narrow the Focus

1. Focus

Explain the Process

Say: After we’ve brainstormed ideas for writing, we have many ideas to choose from. But how do we know which ones are best? One thing that can help us decide is asking questions about each writing idea. Then we can use our answers to decide which ones will work best for us. We can ask different types of questions depending on the genre we’re writing. Let me show you how asking questions helps me choose the best ideas for writing.

Model Evaluating Informational Report Ideas to Narrow Your Focus

Display an Informational Report Ideas Evaluation chart like the one shown for this lesson 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 thinking aloud to narrow the focus.

<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>collecting antique schoolbooks</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German Shepherd dogs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>long-distance running</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sample Informational Report Ideas Evaluation Chart (BLM 2)

Read aloud first evaluation question. Say: This is a topic that I like a lot. It’s about my favorite hobby. I’m going to write “yes” to this question because I think it’s a good idea for me. But what if I’d answered “no”? Would it still be a good topic for me to write about? (Allow responses.) Definitely not! If I’d decided that I was no longer interested in writing about collecting old books, I certainly wouldn’t want to do all the hard work it would take to write a report about it.

Read aloud second evaluation question. Say: I’ve been collecting antique schoolbooks for years. I know which ones were used in different parts of our country and which companies published them. I know a lot about which ones are the most valuable and I have a pretty good idea about what they should cost. Yes, I do know enough to get started on this topic. I’ll write “yes” to this question, too.

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

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

Preparation

Materials Needed

• Chart paper and markers
• Informational Report Ideas Evaluation Chart (BLM 2)
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the Informational Report Ideas Evaluation chart onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. Also copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs,” if necessary.
Read aloud third evaluation question. **Say:** I’m finding out that there’s a lot I still don’t know about collecting old schoolbooks. If I want my report to be more complete, I’ll need more information. I still have a lot of questions that I’d like the answers to so my collection will be better. I absolutely want to know more about this topic! So, I’ll answer “yes” to the last question, too. I think I’ll enjoy finding out more.

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 topic do I know more about?*
- *Which topic would I most like to research?*

**2. Rehearse**

**Practice Narrowing the 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 back together and invite volunteers to share an idea they evaluated and how they answered the questions. Encourage them to explain how the questions influenced their decisions.

**3. Independent Writing and Conferring**

**Say:** We just learned a strategy for narrowing our focus for writing an informational report. You can use the same kind of chart to evaluate your ideas during independent writing time. Choosing the best topic from those you brainstormed is a very important part of being a good writer.

Make BLM 2 available to students who are ready to select their informational report topic 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 two or three students who have finished evaluating their ideas to share the report topics they chose and to discuss how they made their decisions.

**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 students will need as they evaluate their idea with a partner during the “Practice Narrowing the Focus” activity:

- *I like/do not like _____.*
- *I know/do not know enough about _____.*
- *I want/do not want to learn more about _____.*