Evaluate Ideas to Narrow the Focus

**Objectives**

In this mini-lesson, students will:
- Learn how to use idea evaluation questions to narrow the writing focus for a personal narrative.
- Work with a partner to evaluate their own personal narrative ideas using the questions.
- Discuss the strategy and how they can use it in their own writing.

**Preparation**

**Materials Needed**
- Chart paper and markers
- Personal Narrative Ideas Evaluation Chart (BLM 2)
- Interactive whiteboard resources

**Advanced Preparation**

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the Personal Narrative Ideas Evaluation chart onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. Also copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs,” if necessary.

**1. Focus**

**Explain the Process**

**Say:** We’ve brainstormed our ideas for personal narratives. Now how do we decide which idea to write about? How do we narrow our focus and come up with the best idea? One thing we can do is use an evaluation chart and ask ourselves questions about our topic ideas. We can use the answers to our questions to help us decide which topic to write about. Let me show you how I narrow the focus before I write a personal narrative.

**Model Evaluating Personal Narrative Ideas to Narrow Your Focus**

Display a personal narrative ideas evaluation chart like the one shown for this lesson or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Read aloud each evaluation question. Use the sample personal narrative ideas on the chart or list ideas of your own to model thinking aloud to narrow the focus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Narrative Ideas</th>
<th>Do I like this event enough to write about it?</th>
<th>Do I remember many details to write about?</th>
<th>Do I want to share this event with others?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>when I got my first pet</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my first airplane trip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the day I met Susan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the first time I babysat for my neighbor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sample Personal Narrative Ideas Evaluation Chart (BLM 2)**

**Read aloud first evaluation question.** Say: If I can’t answer “yes” to this question, I know it’s not a good idea for a personal narrative. If I don’t like the idea, it’s not one I’m going to enjoy writing about. The first idea on my chart is about when I got my first pet. When I brainstormed this idea, I thought it was a good one, and I still do. I can remember how much fun it was to choose my puppy from all the ones at the pet shop. I’m going to write “yes” in this column.

**Read aloud second evaluation question.** Say: I do remember lots of details about getting my new pet. I can remember how hard it was to choose from all the puppies there and I can remember when I saw mine. I just knew she was the one! I can remember how I felt when I held her for the first time. I’m sure I have lots of details to make my personal narrative one that other people would really enjoy reading. I’m going to write “yes” in this column, too.
Read aloud third evaluation question. Say: Sometimes a good idea may not be a good choice for writing. Maybe it’s one that makes us sad or embarrassed, or maybe it’s just something that we don’t feel good about sharing. That’s OK. Writers get to choose what to share and what not to share. I have really good memories of getting my puppy, but I have some sad ones, too. I didn’t get to keep her for very long and that’s hard for me to think about. So, even though I like the idea and I can remember a lot of details, I’m going to write “no” in the last column. This is not an idea I want to consider now.

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 event do I remember the most details about?
- Which event do I feel most comfortable sharing with others?

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 a personal narrative. If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Ideas

Bring students together and invite them to share an idea they evaluated. Ask them to tell how they answered the questions and how the process helped them decide on their ideas.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned a strategy for narrowing our focus to decide which personal narrative ideas we want to write about. You can use the same evaluation chart when you’re deciding about your own topic ideas.

Make BLM 2 available to students who are ready to select a personal narrative 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 students who have finished evaluating their ideas to share their personal narrative topics and discuss the process they used to narrow their focus.

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 this idea because ______.
Some details I remember about this event are ______.
I want/do not want to share this event because ______.

**All Levels**
If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share this English/Spanish cognate: **details/los detalles**.