Use What You Don’t Know to Brainstorm Ideas

1. Focus

Explain the Brainstorming Process

Say: All writers brainstorm. It helps them think about and write down the ideas that pop into their minds when they’re deciding what to write about. When we want to write a procedure for doing something we’ve never done before, brainstorming is a way to search our minds for things we wish we knew how to do. These ideas would involve learning about things we’re really interested in and would like to know how to do like an expert! Let me show you how I use what I don’t know, but want to know, to brainstorm ideas for a procedural text.

Model Using What You Don’t Know to Brainstorm Ideas

Use the sample think-aloud to help you develop your own brainstorming models to share with students. Choose ideas that will allow you to demonstrate your true interests and desire to learn about something new. Demonstrate how you write down your ideas on chart paper.

Sample think-aloud. Say: Not long ago, a good friend told me about the house that’s next door to hers. It caught on fire in the middle of the night! There were several young children living there, and it was a really bad fire. But, do you know what happened? Everyone got out, even the youngest child, who’s only five. Everyone in the family knew what to do if the house ever caught on fire. They knew how to get out safely and where to meet once they were outside. What if that happened to my family? We don’t really know how to get out of our house safely. I could write the procedure for how to evacuate your house during a fire. I would have to learn the steps first. Then I would know what to do. I’m going to write that idea on my list, because it’s something I really need to know about. I’ve also never planted an herb garden before and I’d really like to know how. I like to use fresh herbs when I cook. That’s another idea I can put on my list. Continue talking about other ideas to include on the chart.

Things I Don’t Know How to Do

• get out of a burning house
• plant an herb garden
• play soccer
• make soap
• train a dog

Sample Brainstorming Chart
2. Rehearse

**Practice Using What You Don’t Know to Brainstorm Ideas**

Invite students to work with a partner to brainstorm ideas for a procedural text based on things they don’t know how to do but would like to know how to do. Remind students to jot down their ideas in their writer’s notebooks.

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

**Share Ideas**

Call students back together and ask them to share ideas from their brainstorming. As students contribute ideas, record them on a class list. Read the list together and discuss the range of ideas for procedures and the wide diversity of interests in the classroom.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

**Say:** We just learned one way to brainstorm ideas for procedural texts—thinking about things we don’t know how to do but would like to know. When you brainstorm by yourself, think of procedures you’ve never done before that you have a strong interest in learning how to do.

Encourage students to apply this brainstorming strategy during independent writing time, as appropriate. During student conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to share new ideas for procedures they have come up with by brainstorming about things they would like to learn how to do.

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**Strategies to Support ELs**

**Beginning**

Invite beginning ELs to use whatever words they can to tell you about a simple process they would like to know how to do. An alternative would be to ask students to draw a procedure they choose. Provide a simple sentence frame to help them talk about their ideas: *I want to know ______.*

**Intermediate and Advanced**

Provide sentence frames to help ELs talk to their partners about their topic for a procedural text. For example:

*I don’t know how to ______.*
*I would like to know how to ______.*