Evaluate Your Ideas to Narrow the Focus

1. Focus

Explain Narrowing the Focus

Say: We’ve learned that during brainstorming, we think of as many ideas as we can for our writing. Then we need to narrow our focus and choose the best idea. Asking questions about each idea is one way to do that. When we use a rubric, we rank our answers from number one, which is lowest, to number three, which is highest. This gives us more specific information about an idea than just answering yes or no to the question. We can total the scores and see which ideas we should still consider and which ones we should eliminate. Ideas that get the highest score are obviously our best ideas. Today I’m going to show you how asking questions specifically about an informational report and ranking my answers helps me choose the best topics.

Model Evaluating Ideas to Narrow Your Focus

Display an evaluation rubric for information reports like the one shown for this lesson or using the interactive whiteboard version. 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>How certain am I that I like this topic?</th>
<th>How certain am I that I know enough about this idea to get started?</th>
<th>How certain am I that I can research this topic?</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Causes of the American Revolution</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The colony at Roanoke</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wetland ecosystems</td>
<td></td>
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Sample Informational Report Topic Ideas Evaluation Rubric (BLM 2)

After the first evaluation question. Say: I like this idea because it’s about the beginnings of our country. I think this is an important topic so I’m very certain that I want to write about this. Write the number 3 in the appropriate column.

After the second evaluation question. Say: I know that the reasons for the American Revolution were very complex. I know about issue of “taxation without representation” and the Boston Tea Party. I know that there is a lot more about this topic though. But, I feel certain that I know enough to get research questions that will get me started. I’m going to rate this question a two. Write the number 2 in the appropriate column.
After the third evaluation question. Say: Because the American Revolution is so important to Americans, I know that there has been a lot written about it. I’m very certain that I can find enough research on the topic. I’m going to rate this question a three. (Write the number 3 in the appropriate column.) Now that I’ve rated each question for this idea, I’ll total my numbers. (Write 8 in the correct box.) A score of eight is pretty high, so this idea must be a good one for me to write about.

Explain that, as students evaluate ideas, they might end up with two or more ideas with the same score. If this happens, encourage them to use the following questions to help them choose between the ideas:

- Which idea would I like most to research?
- Which idea would I choose to read about?

2. Rehearse

Practice Narrowing the Focus

Invite students to work with partners to use the rubric and apply the evaluation questions to one of their ideas 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 ranked the answers to the questions. Ask students to discuss how using a ranking system helped them choose an idea.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned a strategy for narrowing our focus for writing an informational report. We used a rubric and rated our answers to questions about the topics. 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 a very important part of writing a good report.

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 the class together. Invite any students who have finished evaluating their ideas to share the topics they have chosen to write about for their informational reports.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Work individually with beginning students to help them rank their answers to the questions on the rubric.

Intermediate and Advanced

Write and model the following sentence frames that students will need as they evaluate their idea with a partner:

I would rate this question a ______ because ______.
I like/do not like this topic because ______.
I am certain/somewhat certain I could research this topic because ______.