Evaluate Your Ideas to Narrow the Focus

Objectives

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

1. Focus

Explain Evaluating to Narrow the Focus

Say: Before we can begin drafting our persuasive letters, we need to narrow our focus and select the best topic to write about. We can ask questions to help us evaluate our topic ideas. We can rate our answers from one to three, with one being the lowest and three being the highest. Then we can use the scores we get to help us decide on a topic. Let me show you how I use questions to help me narrow my ideas for a persuasive letter.

Model Evaluating Ideas to Narrow Your Focus

Display an evaluation rubric for persuasive letters like the one shown for this lesson or use the interactive whiteboard version. Read aloud each evaluation question. Use the sample topic ideas on the chart or substitute your own to model thinking aloud to narrow the focus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Ideas for a Persuasive Letter</th>
<th>How Certain Am I That I Like This Idea and Have a Strong Opinion About It?</th>
<th>How Certain Am I That This Topic Has Multiple Pro and Con Arguments?</th>
<th>How Certain Am I That I Can Write About This Topic in a Compelling Way?</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water bottles on desks</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junk food</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returning library books to shelves</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recycling trash</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 3—very certain  2—certain  1—somewhat certain

Sample Persuasive Letter Topic Ideas Evaluation Rubric (BLM 2)

After first evaluation question. Say: As a teacher, one issue that especially concerns me is about water bottles on desks. They are distracting during class time because kids tend to play with them instead of doing their work or paying attention in class. I feel very strongly about this. I also have other issues with the water bottles: some kids don’t have them and feel left out and sometimes the logos on the bottles are offensive. I am very certain that this is a good issue for me to write a persuasive letter about. Write 3 in the appropriate column.

After second evaluation question. Say: This topic certainly has many pro and con arguments. On the one hand, we all know that drinking enough water is important and it helps keep us hydrated and alert. On the other hand, there are reasons why having water bottles on our desks is not a good idea. I’m certain I
can discuss both sides, but come up with strong arguments for my point of view that will make my persuasive letter interesting and thoughtful. I will rate this question a two. Write 2 in the appropriate column.

**After third evaluation question. Say:** This is an issue that concerns all of us at school. I think readers would want to read more about the issue and hear different points of view. I am certain that I could write a compelling argument that others would want to read. I am going to rate this question a two. (Write 2 in the appropriate column.) Now that I’ve rated each question for this idea, I’ll total my numbers. (Write 7 in the correct box.) This idea got seven out of nine points. That’s pretty high, so it’s probably a good idea for me to write about. I will compare it to the scores I get for other ideas. 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 concerns me the most?**
- **Which idea do I think others would most want to read about?**

### 2. Rehearse

**Practice Narrowing the Focus**

Invite students to work with a partner to apply the evaluation questions on the rubric to one idea they have for a persuasive letter. 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 the way they rated the answers to the questions. Ask students to discuss how using a rubric can help them choose an idea.

### Strategies to Support ELs

**Beginning**

Work individually with beginning students to help them answer the evaluation questions on the chart.

**Intermediate and Advanced**

Provide sentence frames to help ELs talk to their partners as they evaluate their ideas for writing. For example:

- I have/do not have a strong opinion about ______.
- One argument for this issue is ______.
- One argument against this issue is ______.
- Others would/would not be interested in reading about this because ______.

**All Levels**

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: *opinion/la opinión; persuade/persuadir; persuasive/persuasivo(a).*

### 3. Independent Writing and Conferring

**Say:** We used a rubric to help us narrow our ideas for a persuasive letter. We asked questions specific to persuasive letters that helped us evaluate our ideas. It’s important that the idea we choose is one that we feel strongly about and can write a compelling argument for. A rubric can help us decide which idea will work best.

Make BLM 2 available to students who are ready to select their ideas for writing a persuasive letter 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 volunteers to share the topic they chose and explain why.