Evaluate Your Ideas to Narrow the Focus

**Objectives**

In this mini-lesson, students will:

- Learn how to use idea evaluation questions to narrow their writing focus for a biography.
- Work with partners to evaluate one of their own biography topic ideas using the questions.
- Discuss the strategy and how they can use it in their own writing.

**Preparation**

**Materials Needed**

- Chart paper and markers
- Biography Subject Ideas Evaluation Rubric (BLM 2)
- Interactive whiteboard resources

**Advanced Preparation**

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the Biography Subject Ideas Evaluation rubric onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson.

**1. Focus**

**Explain Evaluating Your Ideas**

Say: Once we’ve brainstormed several people who we think would be a good choice for a biography, we need to narrow our focus by determining which person we want most to write about. We can use a rubric that lets us rate our answers depending on how strongly we feel about them. This gives us more specific information than just a yes or a no. We can ask different types of questions depending on the genre. Then we can use our answers to decide which people we still want to consider and which ones we should eliminate. Let me show you how asking questions helps me narrow my focus for writing a biography.

**Model Evaluating Ideas to Narrow Your Focus**

Display an evaluation chart for a biography on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources like the one shown for this lesson. Read aloud each evaluation question. Use the sample topic ideas on the chart or replace them with ideas of your own to model thinking aloud to narrow the focus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas for the subject of my biography</th>
<th>How much do I know about this person?</th>
<th>How interested am I in this person?</th>
<th>How willing am I to research this person?</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abraham Lincoln</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sojourner Truth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aristotle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alexander the Great</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sample Biography Subject Ideas Evaluation Rubric (BLM 2)

**After first evaluation question.** Say: I do know something about Abraham Lincoln based on what we studied in social studies this year. Knowing something about my subject will help me develop research questions for what I still need to find out. On a scale of one to four, I would rate this question a three. Write a 3 in the correct box on the chart.

**After second evaluation question.** Say: I am very interested in finding out more about Abraham Lincoln. I’d like to know more about his personal life and the kind of person he was. I’d also like to find out more about the role he played in the Civil War. Write a 3 in the correct box on the chart.
After third evaluation question. Say: Abraham Lincoln is a well-known person in history, so I know it will be easy to find lots of information about him. Since I have a strong interest in learning more about him and because I know that it will be easy to find answers to my research questions, I will rate this question a four. Write a 4 in the correct box on the chart.

Say: Now that I’ve rated each question for this idea, I’ll total my numbers. (Write 10 in the correct box.) A score of ten out of twelve 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 person do you find most interesting?
• Which person would you like most to read about?

2. Rehearse

Practice Narrowing the Focus

Invite students to work with partners and apply the evaluation questions on the rubric to one idea they have for a biography. 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 them to share an idea they evaluated and discuss how the questions helped them decide if it is a good idea for writing a biography.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned that we can use questions specific to the biography genre to help us narrow our focus and choose the best topics for a biography. You can use this same chart to evaluate your ideas anytime you’re choosing a topic for writing a biography.

Make BLM 2 available to students who are ready to select their biography 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 for a biography to share the subject they have chosen to write about. Ask them to explain why they chose a particular person.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning
Work individually with beginning ELs to help them answer the three questions on the evaluation chart.

Intermediate
Model the following sentence structures to help ELs talk to their partners as they evaluate their ideas for writing. For example:

- I would rate this question a ______ because ______.
- I am interested/not interested in this person because ______.
- I do/do not want to research this person because ______.

All Levels
If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: interested/interesado(a); person/la persona.