Evaluate Your 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 memoir.
• Work with partners to evaluate their own ideas for a memoir using the questions.
• Discuss the strategy and how they can use it in their own writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed

• Chart paper and markers
• Memoir Topic Evaluation Rubric (BLM 2)
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the Memoir Topic Evaluation rubric onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” onto chart paper.

Preparation Tip

This mini-lesson models narrowing the focus based on an idea brainstormed during the “Brainstorm Ideas Using a Time Line” lesson.

Explain Evaluating Your Ideas

Say: We brainstormed ideas for writing a memoir, thinking about periods in our lives that were significant. Now we have several good ideas to choose from, but how do we know which idea to choose? We can ask questions about our memoir topics and rate the answers on a rubric. We can then total the scores and see which of our ideas gets the highest score. Let me show you how I use questions and a rubric to narrow the focus and help me choose the best idea for a memoir.

Model Evaluating Ideas to Narrow Your Focus

Display on chart paper an evaluation rubric for memoirs like the one shown for this lesson or use the interactive whiteboard resources. Read aloud each evaluation question. Use the sample memoir ideas on the chart or list ideas of your own to model thinking aloud to narrow the focus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas for a Memoir</th>
<th>How much did this event affect my life?</th>
<th>How well do I remember details about this event?</th>
<th>Do I want to share my feelings about this time in my life with others?</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My first job</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Jen Lu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grandfather passing away</td>
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Scale: 4—very high     3—high    2—medium    1—low

Sample Memoir Topic Evaluation Rubric (BLM 2)

After first evaluation question. Say: Before I got my first job, I wasn’t sure about going to college. My mom and dad always reminded me that if I went to college, I would have a chance at an interesting career and a chance to earn more money. But I didn’t listen to them. I remember that my first job was working in a restaurant over the summer. I had to clean and reset all the tables. After only a week at the job, I was worn out. I dreaded going in to work in the mornings. Then I got my first paycheck and couldn’t believe how little it was for all the hard work I’d done. That summer job suddenly made going to college a much more appealing option. I will rate this question a four. Model writing a 4 on the rubric.

After second evaluation question. Say: That summer was a long time ago. I do remember the people I worked with, but I think I may have forgotten specific details about the kind of work I did. Model writing a 2 on the rubric.
After third evaluation question. Say: I do think it's important to share this period in my life with others and my feelings about my experience. My memoir could affect someone else's life by helping him or her decide whether or not to go to college. I'll rate this question a three. Model writing a 3 on the rubric.

Say: Now that I've rated each question for this idea, I'll total my numbers. (Write 9 in the correct box.) This idea scored high on some questions and low on others. This might not be the best idea 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 topic do you feel you could write the most details about?
- Which topic do you feel most comfortable sharing?
- Which topic would people benefit the most from reading about it?

2. Rehearse

Practice Narrowing the Focus

Invite students to work with partners to apply the evaluation questions on the rubric to one idea they have for a memoir. 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. Ask them to tell how they answered the questions and how the process helped them keep or discard ideas.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned a strategy for helping us decide which ideas for a memoir are the best ones for us to write about. You can use the same evaluation rubric when you're choosing your own topics. It's important to have a memoir topic for which you can provide many details and that you want to share with others.

You may wish to make BLM 2 available to students who are ready to select their memoir topics during independent writing time. During student 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 their memoir to share the topics they have chosen to write about. Ask them to explain why they chose their particular topics.

Strategies to Support ELs

**Beginning**

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

**Intermediate**

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

This event had a big effect on my life because ______.
I do/do not want to share my feeling about this with others because ______.

**All Levels**

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: details/los detalles; transition/la transición.