Evaluate Your Ideas to Narrow the Focus

1. Focus

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

• Learn how to use idea evaluation questions to narrow the writing focus for a persuasive essay.
• Work in small groups to evaluate their own ideas using the evaluation questions.
• Discuss the strategy and how they can use it in their own writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed

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

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the Persuasive Essay 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.

Explain Evaluating Your Ideas

Say: We brainstormed ideas for a persuasive essay, thinking about important and sometimes controversial topics we have studied in science and social studies. Now that we have a good list of topic ideas, we need to decide which topic will be the best one for us to write about. We can use a rating scale along with statements specific to persuasive essays to help us determine which topic to choose. Our answers will help us know which ideas to consider and which ones to eliminate. Let me show you how I ask questions as a strategy for narrowing my writing focus for a persuasive essay.

Model Evaluating Ideas to Narrow Your Focus

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas for a Persuasive Essay</th>
<th>Do I have a strong opinion about this topic?</th>
<th>Does this topic have multiple points of view?</th>
<th>Can I write a compelling essay on this topic?</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fast food and health</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genetic stem cell research</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destruction of native forests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Internment of Japanese Americans during World War II</td>
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</tbody>
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Scale: 4—very high  3—high  2—medium  1—low

Sample Persuasive Essay Topic Evaluation Rubric (BLM 2)

After first evaluation question. Say: Almost every day we read about or hear about or watch a program about eating more healthily. There is also a lot of controversy about fast food chains. I feel strongly that fast food doesn’t have to be unhealthy. I would like to argue this position in an essay. I will rate this question a three. Model writing 3 on the rubric.

After second evaluation question. Say: A good persuasive essay needs to be one that is controversial and has many opposing viewpoints. I think the question of fast food and health is one that does have differing viewpoints. I also think I can counter the opposing views with strong arguments. I will rate this statement a three. Model writing 3 on the rubric.
After third evaluation question. **Say:** When you feel strongly about a topic, it’s easier to write about it in a compelling way. I have to really believe that my opinion on fast food is the right one and I have to be able to convince others. I think I can do that for this topic. Also, writing about a topic that others are interested and also feel strongly about makes an essay that people will want to read. I’ll rate this statement a four. Model writing 4 on the rubric.

**Say:** Now that I’ve rated each question for this idea, I’ll total my numbers. (Write 10 in the correct box.) This topic idea has scored pretty high. I will see how my other ideas score.

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 I feel most strongly about?
- Which topic do I think others would find most interesting to read?

**2. Rehearse**

**Practice Narrowing the Focus**

Invite students to work with partners to apply the statements to one idea for a persuasive essay and come up with a rating. If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

**Share Ideas**

Bring students back together. Invite volunteers to share a topic from their list and tell how rating the statements helped them determine whether the topic was a good choice for a persuasive essay.

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**Strategies to Support ELs**

**Beginning**

Work individually with beginning ELs to have them tell about an issue they feel strongly about and to explain why. Encourage students to use gestures, pictures, or words to convey their thinking. Help them rate the statements on the rubric.

**Intermediate and Advanced**

Provide sentence frames to help ELs talk to their partners as they evaluate their topics for a persuasive writing essay. For example:

- I feel strongly/do not feel strongly about this topic because ______.
- An argument for this topic is ______.
- An argument against this topic is ______.
- I could/could not write a compelling essay about this topic because ______.

**All Levels**

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: argument/el argumento; persuasive/persuasivo(a).