Evaluate Your Ideas to Narrow the Focus

1. Focus

Explain the Process

Say: When writers brainstorm ideas for writing, we list several ideas. We have to narrow our focus and decide which idea is best. We can do this by asking ourselves questions about our ideas. Based on the answers to our questions, we can decide if the idea is a good one or not. Let me show you how I ask questions to choose my best idea for writing a personal narrative.

Model Evaluating Your Ideas to Narrow the Focus

Display a Personal Narrative Ideas Evaluation chart like the one shown here on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Read aloud each evaluation question. Use the sample personal narrative ideas on the chart or list ideas of your own to model thinking aloud to narrow the focus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Personal Narrative Ideas</strong></th>
<th><strong>Do I want to write about this event?</strong></th>
<th><strong>Do I remember details about what happened?</strong></th>
<th><strong>Do I want to share with others what happened to me?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>my really bad haircut</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>when I came in last at the race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my best birthday ever</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>catching a big fish</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sample Personal Narrative Ideas Evaluation Chart (BLM 2)

Read aloud first evaluation question. Say: If I can’t answer yes to this question, I know it’s not a good idea for a personal narrative. If I don’t like the idea, it’s not one I’m going to enjoy writing about. The first event on my chart is about when I got a really bad haircut. When I brainstormed this idea, I thought it was a good one, and I still do. I can remember how excited I was about changing from long hair to a short style. I can also remember how I felt when my hair was all over the floor! I’m going to write “yes” to this question.

Read aloud second evaluation question. Say: I do remember lots of details about getting my new haircut. I’d never been to a hair salon before and I was a little nervous. I took in pictures from magazines of girls with short hairstyles like I thought I wanted. But when it was all over, I didn’t look anything like the girls in those photos. I just remember thinking that I looked like someone whose hair had been cut with a weed whacker! As hard as my mom tried, she couldn’t make me feel better. But she was right about one thing: all my hair did grow back—eventually! I have lots of details to make this idea one that other people would really enjoy reading. I’m going to write “yes” in this column, too.

Objectives

**In this mini-lesson, students will:**

- Learn how to use idea evaluation questions to narrow the writing focus for a personal narrative.
- Work with a partner to evaluate their own personal narrative ideas using the questions.
- Discuss the strategy and how they can use it in their own writing.

Preparation

**Materials Needed**

- Chart paper and markers
- Personal Narrative Ideas Evaluation Chart (BLM 2)
- Interactive whiteboard resources

**Advanced Preparation**

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the Personal Narrative Ideas Evaluation chart on chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” on chart paper.
Read aloud third evaluation question. **Say:** Sometimes a good idea may not be a good choice for writing. Maybe it’s one that makes us sad or embarrassed, or maybe it’s just something that we don’t feel good about sharing. That’s OK. Writers get to choose what to share and what not to share. My answer to this question is “yes,” because I don’t mind sharing my experience. But if my answer had been “no,” I’d just cross off this idea and go on to the next one.

Continue modeling how to evaluate your ideas as time allows. Make sure to include some “no” answers so students understand how to narrow their ideas.

Explain that as students evaluate ideas, they might end up with two or more ideas in which they have answered “yes” to the questions. If this happens, encourage students to use the following questions to help them choose between the ideas:

- **Which event do I remember the most details about?**
- **Which event do I feel most comfortable sharing?**

### 2. Rehearse

**Practice Narrowing the Focus**

Invite students to work with a partner to apply the evaluation questions on the chart to one idea they have for a personal narrative. 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 choose ideas.

### 3. Independent Writing and Conferring

**Say:** We just learned a strategy for narrowing our focus to decide which personal narrative idea we want to write about. You can use the same evaluation chart when you’re deciding on your own topic.

You may wish to make BLM 2 available to students who are ready to select their personal narrative 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 topic they have chosen for their personal narratives.

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**Strategies to Support ELs**

**Beginning**

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

**Intermediate and Advanced**

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

- I do/do not want to write about this idea because ______.
- One detail I remember about this idea is ______.
- I want/do not want to share this idea with others because ______.

**All Levels**

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share this English/Spanish cognate: **details/los detalles.**