Evaluate Your Ideas to Narrow the Focus

1. Focus

Explain the Process

Say: When writers brainstorm, we list many ideas that we could write about. But before we begin to write, we need to narrow our focus. We need to look back at the ideas we brainstormed and decide which one we really want to write about. We can do that by asking ourselves questions so we can use our answers to help us decide. Let me show you how I use three questions to help me narrow the focus for writing an informational report.

Model Evaluating Your Ideas to Narrow the Focus

Display an Informational Report 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 informational report ideas on the chart or substitute ideas of your own to model thinking aloud to narrow the focus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas for Writing an Informational Report</th>
<th>Do I want to write about this topic?</th>
<th>What do I know about this topic?</th>
<th>Do I want to learn more about this topic?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the Statue of Liberty</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>- in New York Harbor</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- symbol of freedom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- gift from France</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferris wheels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humpback whales</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample Informational Report Ideas Evaluation Chart (BLM 2)

Read aloud first evaluation question. Say: When I was a teenager, my family went on a trip to New York City. I was so excited when we visited the Statue of Liberty. I know that the Statue of Liberty is really important to America, and I think it’s a very good idea for an informational report. I’m going to write “yes” for my answer to this first question. What if I’d answered “no” to this question? Would it be a good idea for me to write about? (Allow responses.) Probably not! If I’m no longer interested in an idea, it’s not a good choice for a report. I’d just mark it off my list and move on to the next idea.

Read aloud second evaluation question. Say: I do know a few things about the Statue of Liberty. I know the statue is in New York Harbor, and I know why it’s so important. For Americans and for people around the world, it has become a symbol of freedom. Another thing I know is that the statue was a gift to America from France.

Read aloud third evaluation question. Say: I’m sure there’s a lot I don’t know about the Statue of Liberty, but I think I know enough to get started on a report.
I definitely want to learn more about the Statue of Liberty. I’ve wanted to know more about it since I took that trip to New York with my family. Finding out the information will be a lot of fun and very interesting to me, and that’s going to make writing my report a lot easier! I’ll answer “yes” to the last question, too.

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 topic do I know more about?
- Which topic would I most like to learn more about?

2. Rehearse

Practice Narrowing the Focus

Invite students to work in small groups to apply the evaluation questions on the chart to one idea they have for an informational report. Ask them to use the questions on the chart to decide which topic would be best for them to write about. 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 volunteers to share their choices for informational report topics. Encourage them to explain how the evaluation questions influenced their decisions.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned a strategy for narrowing our focus for writing an informational report. We used a chart to evaluate our ideas. You can use the same type of chart before you begin to write. Choosing the best topic from those you brainstormed is an important part of being a good writer.

Make BLM 2 available to students who are ready to select their informational report 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 topics they have chosen for their informational reports.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Work individually with beginning ELs to answer the questions on the chart.

Intermediate

Display the following sentence frames on chart paper. Model how students will use them as they evaluate their ideas with a partner during “Practice Narrowing the Focus.”

I like/do not like this topic because ______.
Something I know about this topic is ______.
I want/do not want to learn more about this topic because ______.

All Levels

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share this English/Spanish cognate: interested/interesado(a).