Evaluate Your Ideas to Narrow the Focus

1. Focus

Explain the Process

Say: When we brainstorm, we list many ideas that we could write about. Before we actually write, however, we need to narrow our focus. We need to select one idea. And that can be harder than it sounds. Sometimes we like many of our ideas! So what can we do? One way to narrow our focus is to ask ourselves some questions about our ideas. Based on our answers to the questions, we can decide whether or not we still want to consider the idea. I’m going to show you how I evaluate my personal narrative ideas using three questions.

Model Evaluating Ideas to Narrow Your Focus

Display a personal narrative ideas evaluation chart like the one shown here on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard version. Read aloud the three evaluation questions. Use the sample personal narrative ideas on the chart or list ideas of your own with which to model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Narrative Ideas</th>
<th>Do I like this event to write about?</th>
<th>Do I remember many details about this event?</th>
<th>Do I want to share this event with others?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>my first day of kindergarten</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the day my baby sister came home from the hospital</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the time I split my chin open</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>when I got a puppy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sample Personal Narrative Ideas Evaluation Chart (BLM 2)

Sample think-aloud. Read aloud the first evaluation question. **Say:** If I can’t answer “yes” to this question, then should I choose this idea? (Allow responses.) Probably not! If I don’t like the idea, chances are that I won’t have enough interest to do the hard work of making a good narrative. The first idea on my chart is my first day of kindergarten. When I brainstormed this idea, I really liked it, and I still like it. I could definitely see myself enjoying writing about that day, so I will write “yes” in that column.

Read aloud the second evaluation question. **Say:** When I write my narrative, I will include many, many details. I’ll describe the time and place, the events that happened, and my thoughts and feelings about what happened. So it’s important that I can visualize these details in my mind. When I think about
my first day of kindergarten, I can see myself there very clearly. I may not remember every detail, but I remember enough to make my personal narrative dramatic and interesting, so I will write “yes” in this column, too.

Read aloud the third evaluation question. Say: Sometimes writers have very good ideas, but they don’t want to share them with others. Maybe an idea feels too personal or painful to share. And that’s okay. As writers, we get to decide what we’re willing to share with our audience and what we want to keep private. As I think about my first day of kindergarten, I’m not sure I really want to share this with others. I like the idea, and I know that I have plenty of details to write about, but I’m not sure I would enjoy having others read about how I cried on my first day of school. So even though I like the idea and I have a lot of details, I’m going to write “no” under this question.

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 together and invite volunteers to share an idea they evaluated and how they answered the questions. Ask students to discuss how the process worked for them.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned one strategy for how to narrow our focus and select a personal narrative idea. You can use this same evaluation chart when you are deciding what personal narrative idea to write about.

Make BLM 2 available to students who are ready to select their personal narrative topic 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 a few students who have finished evaluating their ideas to share the topics they have chosen for their personal narratives.

Strategies to Support ELs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>All Levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work individually with beginning ELs to answer the three questions on the chart.</td>
<td>If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: details/los detalles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Intermediate

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

I like/I do not like this event because ____.
The details I remember are ____.
I want/I don’t want to share this event because ____.