Evaluate Your Ideas to Narrow the Focus

1. Focus

Explain the Process of Narrowing Ideas

Say: When we’re deciding on a topic or story to write about, we often have more good ideas than we can use. Today we’re going to learn how to narrow a list of ideas by asking ourselves some questions. These questions are going to help us evaluate which of our ideas is best for us to use.

Model Evaluating Ideas to Narrow Your Focus

Display a Realistic Fiction Ideas Evaluation chart like this one on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Read aloud each evaluation question. Use the sample ideas on the chart or list ideas of your own to model thinking aloud to narrow the focus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Realistic Fiction Ideas</th>
<th>Do I like this problem as a story idea?</th>
<th>Can I make this story idea interesting?</th>
<th>Can I solve the story problem?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I wrecked my friend’s new bike</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I left my lunch at home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I left the water running in the bathtub</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need to get a present for my mom’s birthday</td>
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Sample Realistic Fiction Ideas Evaluation Chart (BLM 2)

After first question. Say: Stories are built on a problem that the characters have to solve. This is the first question to ask because if I don’t like the story problem idea, then I won’t be able to make the story work. Let’s see, do I like this problem for a story idea? I think it would be fun to write. I’ll write “yes” in the first column. If I had answered “no” to this question, do you think it’s one I should choose to write about? (Allow responses.) Probably not! If I don’t have a good idea for a story problem, the story would not be interesting.

After second question. Say: I want to write a story that’s interesting for other people to read—a story that sounds like it could really happen to someone. I’ll need to use details and descriptions to explain the problem and how it was solved. I think I can do that if I use this story idea, so I’ll write “yes” to the second question, too.

After third question. Say: I can think of several ways to solve the story problem if I use this idea. I could tell how I fixed the bike and how my friend forgave me. Another solution could be that I had to buy my friend a new bike with
my savings. For my story to be good, my readers will want to know about the problem and how it was solved. I’m sure I can do that with this idea—so, I’ll write “yes” here, 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 story idea would I most want to read about?
• Which idea do I feel most strongly about?

2. Rehearse

Practice Evaluating Ideas to Narrow Your Focus

Invite students to work with a partner to apply the evaluation questions on the chart to one idea they have for a realistic story. 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 ideas they evaluated and how they answered the questions. Ask students to discuss how using the questions helped them focus on a single idea.

Strategies to Support ELs

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

Intermediate and Advanced
Display and model the following sentence frames that students will need as they evaluate their idea with a partner:
I do like / I do not like this story problem because ______.
I can make this story interesting by ______.
I can solve the problem by ______.

All Levels
If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: decide/decidir; interesting/interesante; problem/el problema; solution/la solución.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned what kind of questions we can ask ourselves in order to narrow our focus when we’re trying to select a realistic fiction story idea. We learned that we ask different questions depending on the genre we are writing. Use these questions during independent writing time when you evaluate the rest of the story ideas you brainstormed.

Make BLM 2 available to students who are ready to select their realistic fiction 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 students together. Invite students who have finished evaluating their ideas to share their realistic fiction topics.