Evaluate Your Ideas to Narrow the Focus

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:
- Learn how to use idea evaluation questions to narrow their focus for writing a persuasive letter.
- Work with a partner to evaluate their own ideas using the questions.
- Discuss the strategy and how they can use it in their own writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed
- Chart paper and markers
- Persuasive Letter Ideas Evaluation Chart (BLM 2)
- Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation
If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the Persuasive Letter Ideas Evaluation chart onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” onto chart paper as well.

1. Focus

Explain the Process of Narrowing Your Persuasive Letter Ideas

Say: In each writing genre, we use questions to help us evaluate the ideas we brainstorm and to select the idea we really want to write about. When it comes to evaluating our ideas for a persuasive letter, what kinds of questions do you think we might want to ask ourselves? (Allow responses.) Remember, in order to write an effective persuasive letter, we need to make sure we feel strongly about the topic of the letter. Today we’re going to narrow our list of ideas by asking ourselves some questions. These questions are going to help us evaluate which of our ideas is best for us.

Model Evaluating Persuasive Letter Ideas to Narrow Your Focus

Display a Persuasive Letter Ideas Evaluation chart like this one on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Read aloud each evaluation question. Use the sample persuasive letter ideas on the chart or list ideas of your own to model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas for a Persuasive Letter</th>
<th>Do I have a position on this topic?</th>
<th>Can I support my position with facts and examples?</th>
<th>Can I find resources to help me support my position?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>soft drinks in the cafeteria</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bicycle helmets</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school uniforms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skateboards on the sidewalks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample Persuasive Letter Ideas Evaluation Chart (BLM 2)

After first question. Say: My answer to this question about soft drinks in the cafeteria is “no.” Should I choose this idea to write about? (Allow responses.) Absolutely not! If this isn’t something I feel strongly about, I can’t write a good persuasive letter about it. The second idea is about bicycle helmets, and I do feel very strongly about them. I think they’re very important. Every bicycle rider should use a helmet. I’m going to write “yes” to this question because I definitely have an opinion about it.

After second question. Say: I know how important it is to use a helmet when you ride a bicycle. I know because I found out the hard way what happens.
when you don’t! I’m sure I can give facts and examples in my letter to persuade my readers that I’m right. I’ll write “yes” for the second question, too.

After third question. Say: I know I will need to put facts in my letter about the importance of bicycle helmets—facts that are true. Facts will convince my reader that my opinion is right. I know that I can find facts by using books from the library, talking with a policeman, or looking on the Internet. I believe I can find the information I need to make my letter very persuasive, so I’m going to write “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 idea do I feel more strongly about?
• Which idea would I like to research more?

2. Rehearse

Practice Evaluating Persuasive Letter 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 persuasive letter. 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. Encourage a discussion of how the process worked for students.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned what kinds of questions we can use to help us evaluate our persuasive letter ideas. Use this strategy during independent writing time to help you evaluate other ideas you have brainstormed.

Make BLM 2 available during independent writing time to students who are ready to select their idea for writing a persuasive letter. 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 the problem they have chosen to write about in their persuasive letters.