Evaluate Your Ideas to Narrow the Focus

1. Focus

Explain Narrowing the Focus

Say: We took the time to brainstorm ideas we thought would be good ideas for a memoir. Now that we have that list, the next step is to focus. We need to look back at the ideas we brainstormed and decide which one we really want to write about. One good strategy for narrowing our writing focus is to ask questions about each idea and then use our answers to decide which one will work best. We can use a rubric that lets us rate our answers depending on how strongly we feel about them. We can use a rating system where one is the lowest and three is the highest. This gives us more specific information that just a yes or a no. We can ask different types of questions depending on the genre. Let me show you how I do that before I write a memoir.

Model Evaluating Memoir Ideas to Narrow Your Focus

Display an evaluation rubric for a memoir like the one shown for this lesson or use the interactive whiteboard version. Read aloud each evaluation question. Use the sample memoir ideas on the chart or replace them with ideas of your own to model thinking aloud to narrow the focus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Memoir Ideas</th>
<th>How certain am I that this time in my life would make a good memoir?</th>
<th>How certain am I that I can remember many details about this series of events?</th>
<th>How certain am I that I want to share my feelings about this period in my life with others?</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When my brother was born</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I moved to a new town</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I went off to college</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 3—very certain  2—certain  1—somewhat certain

Sample Memoir Ideas Evaluation Rubric (BLM 2)

After first evaluation question. Say: The first idea on my chart made a big difference in my life. I was six at the time and, up until my brother was born, I was the only child. I got all the attention. Then along came my brother and things changed. It took me a while to get used to sharing the attention, but then I became really glad he was around. I’m very certain that this was an important time in my life and that it would make a good memoir. I will rate this question a three. Write the number 3 in the appropriate column.

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

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

Preparation

Materials Needed

• Chart paper and markers
• Memoir Ideas Evaluation Rubric (BLM 2)
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the Memoir Ideas Evaluation rubric onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” on chart paper.
After second evaluation question. **Say:** I do remember quite a bit about what happened during that time, but can I really remember enough details to make an interesting memoir? I’m somewhat certain that I can. I’ll rate this question a **one**. Write the number 1 in the appropriate column.

After 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 it’s something that we don’t feel good about sharing. That’s okay. Writers get to choose what to share and what not to share. I was a brat when my brother first arrived, but we both laugh about it now. I’m certain that I want to share this time in my life with others. I’ll rate this question a **two**. (Write the number 2 in the appropriate column.) Now that I’ve rated each question for this idea, I’ll total my numbers. (Write 6 in the correct box.) This idea got six out of nine points. Maybe there is another idea that will score higher and make a better topic to write about. Explain that as students evaluate ideas, they might end up with two or more ideas with the same score. If this happens, encourage them to use the following questions to help them choose between the ideas:

• Which idea do I remember the most about?
• Which idea do I most want to share with others?

### 2. Rehearse

**Practice Narrowing the Focus**

Invite students to work with a partner to apply the evaluation questions on the rubric to one idea they have for a memoir. If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

**Share Ideas**

Bring students together and invite them to share an idea they evaluated. Ask them to tell how they answered the questions and how the process of scoring their answers on the rubric helped them keep or delete ideas.

### Strategies to Support ELs

**Beginning**

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

**Intermediate and Advanced**

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

- I like/do not like this idea because ______.
- Some details I remember are ______.
- I want/do not want to share this event because ______.

**All Levels**

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: **details/**los detalles; **memory/**la memoria.

### 3. Independent Writing and Conferring

**Say:** We just learned a strategy for narrowing our focus to decide which memoir ideas we want to write about. We asked questions specific to Memoirs that helped us evaluate our ideas. You can use the same evaluation chart when you’re deciding about your own topic ideas.

Make BLM 2 available to students who are ready to select their memoir 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 to write about for their memoirs.