Evaluate Your Ideas to Narrow the Focus

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:
• Learn how to use a rubric and idea evaluation questions to narrow the writing focus for a research report.
• Work in small groups to evaluate their own ideas using the evaluation questions.
• Discuss the strategy and how they can use it in their own writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed
• Chart paper and markers
• Research Report Topic Evaluation Rubric (BLM 2)
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation
If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the Research Report Topic Evaluation rubric onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” onto chart paper.

Preparation Tip
This mini-lesson models narrowing the focus based on an idea brainstormed during the “Use Content Studies to Brainstorm Topics” lesson.

1. Focus

Explain Evaluating Your Ideas

Say: After we’ve brainstormed ideas for writing, we have many ideas we could choose from to write a research report. But how do we know which ones are best? We need a strategy to help us narrow our writing focus. One strategy that works well is asking questions specific to a research report about each of our topic ideas and then rating our answers on a rubric. Then we can use the score to decide which ideas will work for us and which ones won’t. Let me show you how asking questions helps me choose the best topics for writing a research report.

Model Evaluating Ideas to Narrow Your Focus

Display a research report topic evaluation rubric like the one shown for this lesson or use the interactive whiteboard resources. Read aloud each evaluation question. Use the sample research report ideas on the chart or list ideas of your own to model thinking aloud to narrow the focus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas for Research Report</th>
<th>Am I interested in this topic?</th>
<th>Do I know enough about this topic to get started and set good research questions?</th>
<th>Do I want to research and learn more about this topic?</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Sphinx</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Inherited traits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human effect on the environment</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 4—very high 3—high 2—medium 1—low

Sample Research Report Topic Evaluation Rubric (BLM 2)

After first evaluation question. Say: I have always been interested in the culture of ancient Egypt and fascinated by the pyramids and monoliths. The Great Sphinx is mysterious in that it is unclear when and why it was built. I am definitely interested in this topic and I am going to rate this topic a four. Model writing 4 on the rubric.

After second evaluation question. Say: When we studied ancient Egypt, we learned something about the structures built by the Egyptians, including the Sphinx. I know that I need to have enough knowledge to come up with good research questions to expand on what I already know. I think I can do this, so I’m going to rate this question a three. Model writing 3 on the rubric.
After third evaluation question. Say: Because I have such a strong interest in this topic, I definitely want to do research and learn more about this topic. I will rate this question a four. Model writing 4 on the rubric.

Say: Now that I’ve rated each question for this idea, I’ll total my numbers. (Write 11 in the correct box.) A score of eleven out of twelve is high, so this idea must be a good one for me 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 topic interests you the most?
- Which topic would you most enjoy spending time researching?

2. Rehearse

Practice Narrowing the Focus

Invite students to work with partners to use the rubric to evaluate their topic ideas for writing a research report. 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 topic choices for research reports. Encourage them to explain how the questions influenced their decisions.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned a strategy for narrowing our focus for writing a research report. We rated questions about how interested we were in the topic and whether we felt we could research it. You can use the same kind of a rubric before you begin to write your research report. Choosing the best topic from those you brainstormed is extremely important for writing a good research report.

Make BLM 2 available to students who are ready to select their research report topics during independent writing time. During student 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 for research reports to share the topics they have chosen to write about. Ask them to explain why they chose their topics.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Work individually with beginning ELs to help them answer the three evaluation questions on the rubric.

Intermediate and Advanced

Provide sentence frames to help ELs talk to their partners as they evaluate their ideas for writing. For example:

I would rate this question a ______ because ______.
I feel I know/do not know enough about my topic because ______.
I want/do not want to research this topic because ______.