

## Choosing a Topic

We all know that students do their best writing when they select their own topics. They're more invested in the whole process, from research to revision.

But we also know that choosing a topic from the wide world of possibilities is intimidating, even paralyzing, for some children. So the question is: How can we support them?



### Idea Board

During school visits, I tell students about the idea board in my office. [Here's a video](#) of my nieces describing how I use it. Young writers could mimic my process by adding questions and tantalizing tidbits they discover to a classroom idea board.

### Idea List

If you don't have space for an idea board in your classroom, you could encourage students to keep their own personal lists of questions, ideas, and information on the last page of their writer's notebooks.

When you assign a report, you may want to build on what the class is studying in science or social studies. For example, maybe you want everyone to do an animal report or a biography or a report related to the Civil War. That's no problem. Students can use the ideas they've recorded to generate narrowly-focused topics. For example, a young foodie could write about what soldiers ate during the Civil War. A child who's interested in math and statistics might compare various aspects of the Union and Confederate armies. A student who's obsessed with weather, could look at how storms or weather patterns might have affected battles or troop movements.

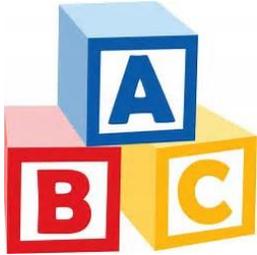
### Idea Jar

If your students are struggling to find a narrow topic using ideas they've collected on an idea board or in their notebooks, you could try an idea jar. Ask students to write ideas related to the topic you've assigned and place them in a jar.



You'll probably find that some students are idea-generating machines. They can help their classmates by focusing on one of their ideas and adding the rest to the classroom idea jar.

You can add ideas too. It's a way to anonymously provide guidance rather than dictate a topic. And because you aren't usurping your students' power to choose, they'll be able to take ownership of the project and the process.



### **ABC Brainstorming**

If all else fails, you can always give ABC brainstorming a try. It can be a fast and fun way to help students come up with ideas that are related to your assignment and of particular interest to them.

Choosing topics is a challenge students will continue to face in middle school, high school, and college, so giving them as many strategies as possible now will help them for years to come.