

Here's an **idea development** activity that focuses students on choosing sub-topics based on interest level:

Choosing Interesting Sub-topics to Research

From the NNWP Traits Training Archives, appropriate for writers of most ages



Student instructions: Part of good idea development is choosing interesting and thoughtful sub-topics to include in your writing. When you investigate or brainstorm a topic, you will find a mixture of really interesting facts and ordinary facts. If you only report on the easy and ordinary facts, your writing will be much less interesting. If you just choose interesting facts that you can't write very much about, your writing will be too short. The trick is to find a balance.

Below, find 20 facts on humpback whales. Put checks next to the 10 facts that you think would make the best sub-topics to include in a piece of writing about humpback whales. Discuss your choices with a partner or a small group. It's okay to disagree.

Humpback whale adults are 45-50 feet long; calves are 15 feet long.

Humpback whale tails have unique markings on them, and that's how researchers can identify them.

Other than giving it its name, the hump on a humpback whale is thought to serve little purpose.

Humpback whales are mammals and can drown if they stay underwater too long.

Humpback whales have a life expectancy of 45-50 years. It is estimated that there are over 10,000-15,000 humpback whales world-wide.

Only male humpback whales "sing;" these songs are used in courtship and to declare territory.

Humpback whales breathe air at the surface of the water through 2 blowholes located near the top of the head. They spout (breathe) about 1-2 times per minute at rest, and 4-8 times per minute after a deep dive.

Humpback whale mothers are very protective of their young. Whalers knew if you killed a calf, its mother could be easily killed afterwards, since it would not leave its baby's carcass.

In their first year, baby calves grow 1.5 feet every month.

A humpback whale may eat up to a ton of food a day when it's in its feeding grounds.

Humpback whales live in both the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans. They migrate up and down the coasts between winter and summer.

The humpback whale is the state mammal of Hawaii, one of their winter calving grounds.

The four-chambered heart of the adult humpback whale weighs 430 pounds.

Humpback whales can dive up to a depth of 700 feet.

Lob-tailing is what it is called when the humpback sticks its tail out of the water into the air, swings it around, and slaps the water. No one is sure why humpbacks do this.

Humpback whales normally swim 3-9 m.p.h., but can go up to 15-16.5 m.p.h. in bursts when in danger.

Scientists believe that whales only sleep with half their brains "turned off" at a time so that they can continue to remember to breathe.

Humpback whales are pregnant for 11 to 12 months.

An average-sized humpback whale will eat 4,400-5,500 pounds of plankton, krill and small, schooling fish each day during the feeding season in cold waters. They eat twice a day.

Breaching is when a humpback shoots out of the water and splashes.