

Here's an **idea development** mini-lesson 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

**Instructions:** Part of good **idea development** involves selecting highly interesting and thoughtful sub-topics to include in your expository writing. When you investigate or research a topic, you will find a mixture of really interesting facts and fairly ordinary facts. If you only report on the easy and ordinary facts, your writing will be much less interesting. If you only choose interesting facts but you don't have very much to say about them, your writing will be too short. The trick is to find a balance so that your final draft includes both the ordinary-but-necessary facts but also features the highly interesting facts that might keep the reader highly engaged in your topic. It's tricky, but skilled writers work on perfecting that balance.



Below, find 20 facts about humpback whales. Put checks next to the 5 facts that you think would grab your reader's attention if they were included in an expository piece of writing as sub-topics if you were asked to write such an essay. Discuss your five choices with your thinking partner or a small group. It's okay to have selected different facts as long as you can thoughtfully discuss your reason for checking the interesting facts you chose.

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.

This handout was created by NNWP writing trait trainer, [Corbett Harrison](#), who gave his permission for it to be included in the Northern Nevada Writing Project's [Going Deep with 6 Trait Language](#) guide for teachers back in 2006. Please consider supporting the NNWP by purchasing this 206-page resource from [Amazon!](#)