

# Objective 1: Selecting interesting facts to report on.

# Objective 2: Putting research into one's own words.

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.

Which five whale facts from your list of twenty do you think readers would find to be the most interesting in an essay about whales?

There are no wrong answers here provided that you can intelligently explain your five choices.

Put a check mark next to the five facts about humpback whales that you determine to be the most interesting.

Try to memorize your five facts if you finish selecting them before your classmates are finished.

**Objective 1: Selecting interesting facts to report on.**

**Objective 2: Putting research into one's own words.**

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**Fold your whale handout in half and leave it on your desk. Stand up and find a partner!**

**Discussion stem/prompt:**

(Recall the handout's facts in your own words please.)

**Of the five facts I selected and checked, the one fact that ISN'T as interesting as the other four is probably \_\_\_\_ and I say that because \_\_\_\_.**

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**Thank your partner. Go find a brand new partner across the room!**

**Discussion stem/prompt:**

(Recall the handout's facts in your own words please.)

**The two facts I checked that seem the most similar/complementary to each other are \_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, and I can justify why I think they're the most similar to each other with this sentence: \_\_\_\_\_.**

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**Thank your partner. Go find a brand new partner across the room!**

**Discussion stem/prompt:**

(Recall the handout's facts in your own words please.)

**The checked fact from my whale handout that might make an interesting introduction to an essay is \_\_\_\_\_, and here's a possible first sentence (or two) for an introduction I might write: \_\_\_\_\_**

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Try creating a first sentence (or two) using a question, then use the same fact again in an introductory sentence that is NOT a question. Ask your partner which introduction he/she prefers after sharing both.

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**Thank your partner. Go find a brand new partner across the room!**

**Discussion stem/prompt:**

(Recall the handout's facts in your own words please.)

**What's one fact you checked that you haven't said much about yet to any of your partners? Ask your partner to help you write a sentence that both paraphrases that particular fact AND uses three really great action verbs.**

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**Thank your partner. Go find a brand new partner across the room!**

**Discussion stem/prompt:**

(Recall the handout's facts in your own words please.)

**In no particular order, try to recall out loud all five facts you checked on your handout, and have your partner give you a thumbs up (or down) for each one that sounds like you remembered the fact but made a good attempt to put it in your own words.**

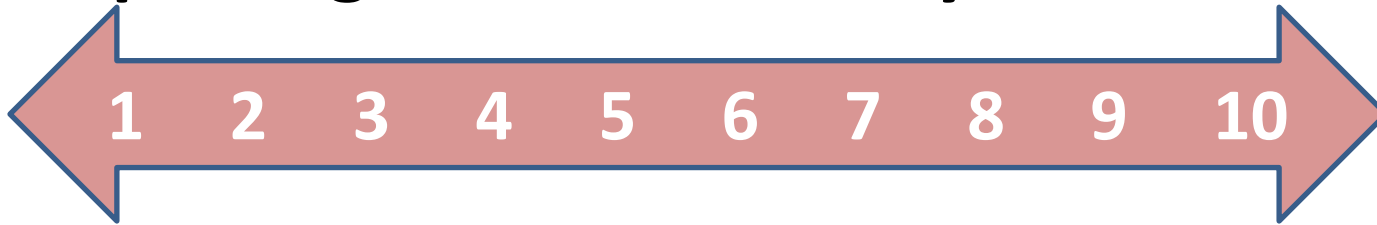
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**Return to your seat and peruse the facts you originally checked on your handout. How did you do with putting the research in your own words?**

This was difficult for me.



This was easy for me.

## **Whole Class Discussion Prompt**

- 1) How confident are you that you could include these five facts in an essay about whales and that you could write about them using your own words through paraphrasing?**
- 2) How/Why does discussing your researched facts with others before writing about those facts improve one's chance of putting research into your own words?**

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