


Teaching informational writing is difficult to do with a student who has not been taught specific writing skills. This young author is a perfect example. It's clear that this child is passionate about the topic but is unable to articulate this effectively in her writing. She is still in search of broad yet distinct main ideas that would better organize her thoughts. Also, while the assignment was to write an informational piece that informs the reader about the topic, the student author has really written an opinion piece. Note the opinion language (Who wouldn't love that? Would you love to have..., etc.) Recognizing the purpose is an important first step in any writing task. Let's take a look.

Author does not have strong main ideas.

Rod floors, long trampolines, and big squishy mats, who wouldn't love that?! cheerstation is a very special place to me.
Never the less rod floors are the best! the rod floor is special to me because you get to do punchfronts, round-off triple backhandsprings and round-off backhandspring layouts.
would you love to have buff coaches around you, because they can one man, give you tips, and spot on new skills.
Last but not least, tumbling. Do you love to do stuff like, standing tucks, toetouch backhand-springs, and punch front round-off back-hand-springs?
Would you like to have buff coaches around? Do you love to tumble? Or maybe even have a couple of rod floors here and there. If so, cheerstation is the place for you.



**Author has repeated
back handsprings
two times.**

The introduction suggests that the main ideas/reasons will be...

- Main Idea #1: Rod Floors
- Main Idea #2: Trampolines
- Main Idea #3: Squishy mats

All of her ideas - rod floors, trampolines, and squishy mats all have to do with the characteristics of the gym and could have been elaborated on in a single paragraph.

Actually, the only place that trampolines are mentioned is in the introduction. The use of detail generating questions “**What does it look like? Why is that Important?**” would help the author to elaborate on this simple list of details. She also mentions back handsprings in paragraph two (about rod floors) as well as in paragraph four (about mats). Her ideas are not broad enough. On another note, because she doesn’t have distinct ideas, she writes about her coaches, which was not one of her main ideas mentioned in her introduction..

EW has an activity called “**pick, list, and choose**” that would help this young author select stronger main ideas. The teacher brainstorms with the students to help elicit more details about her experience at Cheer Station. The list might look like this...

| | | | |
|--------------------|----------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>formations</i> | <i>coaches</i> | <i>volunteers</i> | <i>tumbling</i> |
| <i>uniforms</i> | <i>makeup</i> | <i>shoes</i> | <i>mats</i> |
| <i>trampolines</i> | <i>floors</i> | <i>back handsprings</i> | <i>spread eagles</i> |
| <i>stunts</i> | <i>jumps</i> | <i>practice clothes</i> | <i>judges</i> |

Next, the teacher and students identify categories by highlighting each related detail in a different color.

| | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>formations</i> | <i>coaches</i> | <i>volunteers</i> | <i>tumbling</i> |
| <i>uniforms</i> | <i>makeup</i> | <i>shoes</i> | <i>mats</i> |
| <i>trampolines</i> | <i>floors</i> | <i>back handsprings</i> | <i>spread eagles</i> |
| <i>stunts</i> | <i>managers</i> | <i>practice clothes</i> | <i>judges</i> |

The new main ideas are listed here...

- Main Idea #1: Cheerleader moves (green)
- Main Idea #2: Characteristics of the gym (yellow)
- Main Idea #3: Clothing attire (blue)
- Main idea #4: People that are involved (purple)

These ideas are broad enough and distinct from the rest, so they won’t overlap. The author can generate a lot of different details to support the main ideas. Choosing main ideas can make or break a paper. Try implementing the “pick, list, and choose” activity with your students and you’ll see the quality of details and distinction of main ideas in their informational pieces improve dramatically