

NSW Centre for Effective Reading

Middle Years



Comprehension - Summarising

Introduction

Research suggests instruction and practice in summarising not only improves students' ability to summarise text, but also their overall comprehension of text content ... (Duke and Pearson, 2002, in Cameron, 2009, p.66)

It is one of the most difficult strategies for students to master and one of the hardest to teach. Effective teaching of summarising requires multiple modeling sessions and many opportunities to practice. However, it is worth persisting with, as it is an extremely useful strategy for students to master as they go on to study at higher levels. (Cameron, 2009, p.112)

The following teaching steps are adapted from Denton, C., Bryan, D., Wexler, J., Reed, D. Vaughn, S. (2007) Effective instruction for middle school students with reading difficulties: The reading teacher's sourcebook. University of Texas Systems/Texas Education Agency

Purpose

Students will write a summary that is concise and includes the most important information from an entire passage.

Teaching Steps

1. Teacher develops personal knowledge of:

- The sequence of skills in summarising (see sequence of skills for 'Main Idea')
- The level of skills of the students.
- The text to be summarised.

2. State the purpose of the lesson:

- Discuss the strategy and what it means –

Teacher:

Today we will learn how to summarise what we read. A summary is a shortened version of the original text, and it contains only the most important points, the main ideas and important details and is structurally similar to the original text. We have already learned how to form main ideas for a paragraph. We will need to be good at doing this first.

- Explain the benefits of this strategy –

Teacher:

Summarizing helps the reader in all reading because the overall goal of any reading is to understand the most important points. Summarizing is a skill you will be expected to use throughout your life. You may be asked to give a summary of a phone conversation or a summary of what was discussed in a meeting.

3. Model and teach the strategy:

Introduce summarising:

It is possible to use a scene or segment from a popular movie or a written text as stimulus.

- Tell students that you are going to show them several written summaries of the scene or text read and that you want them to pick the best summary. Remind students that a good summary will be a shortened version of the scene or text and will include only the most important information.
- Show students several correct examples and incorrect examples of good summaries of the scene/text. Correct examples should be short summaries that include only the most important points. Incorrect examples can be lengthy and/or include information that is either irrelevant or too general.
- Discuss each summary with the class and identify whether each statement is an accurate or inaccurate summary of the scene. Elicit discussion to emphasize the reasons that non-examples are not good summaries.

Model the strategy:

Show the students the following chart displaying the procedure for writing a summary.

What is a summary?	
A shortened version of something that includes only the most important details	
HOW TO WRITE A SUMMARY	
STEP 1	LIST the main ideas for each paragraph in the text.
STEP 2	UNDERLINE the main idea statements that include the most important ideas from the text.
STEP 3	COMBINE any ideas that could go into one sentence.
STEP 4	NUMBER the ideas in logical order.
STEP 5	WRITE your summary in one paragraph.
STEP 6	EDIT your summary.

Denton, C., Bryan, D., Wexler, J., Reed, D. & Vaughn S. (2007), p.125

Teacher:

- *Today we are going to write a summary. Yesterday we completed step 1: LIST the main ideas for each paragraph in the passage. Let's look at the statements we wrote.* Ask individual students to read a main idea statement until you have read through them all.
- Step 2: UNDERLINE the main idea statements that include the most important ideas from the passage. Look at each main idea statement again and discuss with the class which main ideas to keep, which to leave out, and why. Constantly remind students that only the most important information goes in the summary. Model the process of deciding which ideas are important.
- Only those main idea statements that contained the most important information have been selected. Step 3: COMBINE any ideas that could go into one sentence. 'Think aloud' as you read the statements and identify some that could be combined into a single sentence. Discuss these decisions with the students.
- Step 4: NUMBER the ideas in a logical order. Read the main idea statements and decide how to put them in order so they make sense. 'Think aloud' through the process of ordering the remaining main idea statements.
- Once the important statements have been underlined, the ones that go together combined, and all the remaining ideas numbered in an order that makes sense, the summary can be written. The summary should be only one paragraph long. Continue to 'think aloud' as you write on the IWB a summary that is several sentences in length, is a shortened version of the passage, and contains the most important information from the passage.
- The last step is to EDIT the summary. To edit is to check for correct capital letters, punctuation, spelling, and, most of all, whether the written summary makes sense. Model checking capitalization, punctuation, and spelling one at a time. Finally, be sure to read the entire summary to model the process of checking to be sure it makes sense.
- Provide additional modelled practice as required.

4. Memorise the strategy:

Memorise the six steps for summarising:

List the main ideas.

Underline the most important

Combine any you can

Number in order

Write the summary

Edit the summary

Use the visual prompt card (see Appendix)

5. Guided practice – support the strategy collaboratively:

- Step 1: LIST THE MAIN IDEAS - Direct students to look at the next section of text. Display the main idea statements for this section on the IWB. Pass out one copy of the same main idea statements to each group or pair of students. Give students 2–3 minutes to read all of the main idea statements with their partners or small groups.

- **Step 2: UNDERLINE THE MOST IMPORTANT** - Give students 1–2 minutes to think about and discuss the section as a whole with their partners or small groups. Then call on individual students to share their thoughts on the big ideas of the section. Next ask students to underline the main idea statements that are most closely related to those big ideas. Give them 2–3 minutes, and then ask for volunteers to share which statements they eliminated and why. Based on class discussion, underline important statements on the IWB.
- **Step 3: COMBINE ANY YOU CAN** - Give students 2–3 minutes to decide whether any of the statements can be combined into one sentence. Ask students to share, lead the class in discussion of the decisions, and note which statements can be combined on the IWB.
- **Step 4: NUMBER IN ORDER** - Give students 3–4 minutes to number the statements to put them into a logical order. Ask students to share, lead the class in discussion of the decisions, and number the statements on the IWB.
- **Step 5: WRITE SUMMARY** - Give students 5–7 minutes to use the statements to develop a summary of the section of text. Then ask students to share their summaries. Discuss the accuracy of each summary by asking:
 - Is this a shortened version of the section?
 - Does this summary include the most important information from the section?

If needed, discuss ways to modify the summaries.

- **Step 6: EDIT SUMMARY** - Give students 3–4 minutes to edit their summaries. Remind them first to check capital letters, then punctuation, then spelling, and, finally, to read their summaries to be sure that they make sense.
- Provide additional guided practice as required.

6. Independent practice – use the strategy by yourself:

- Ask students to read a short text or chapter one paragraph at a time. Students can alternate reading paragraphs aloud to each other. After each paragraph, tell students to find the main idea (discuss who or what the paragraph was mainly about and the most important information about the “who” or the “what”). Then ask students to write a main idea statement for the paragraph in 10 words or less.
- Review steps 1–6 of how to write a summary, and ask students to work through each step with their partner.
- Circulate around the room and be available for assistance. Even though this is independent practice, it is essential that you circulate around the room while groups are working in order to check for understanding and to provide guidance and additional modelling as needed.
- Depending on the length of the text, students will probably need 30–60 minutes to complete steps 1–6.
- When all pairs have a summary written, ask for volunteers to share their summaries. Discuss and evaluate each summary.
- Provide additional independent practice as required.

7. Generalisation:

Teacher:

Many tests will ask you either to choose the best summary or to write a summary yourself. Teachers often ask students to identify or write a summary because summarising indicates that you most likely understand the most important ideas from your reading. Therefore this skill should easily generalise to other subject areas.

Reference

Denton, C., Bryan, D., Wexler, J., Reed, D. & Vaughn S. (2007), *Effective Instruction for Middle School Students with Reading Difficulties: The reading Teachers' Sourcebook*,

Reid, R. & Lienemann, T. O. (2006). *Strategy Instruction for Students with Learning Disabilities*, The Guildford press: New York.

UTCRLA & Texas Education Agency (2004), *Implementing the Reading TEKS in Ninth Grade Instruction Revised*, The university of Texas at Austin, college of Education

Appendix

- Prompt card for memorisation of strategy
- Monitoring chart for summarising
- Main idea chart
- Summarisation sheet

Prompt Card for memorisation

What is a summary? A shortened version of something that includes only the most important details	
HOW TO WRITE A SUMMARY	
STEP 1	LIST the main ideas for each paragraph in the text.
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STEP 6	EDIT your summary.

Monitoring Chart

My Summary		
Have I ...		✓/X
STEP 1	LISTED the main ideas for each paragraph?	
STEP 2	UNDERLINED the most important main idea statements?	
STEP 3	COMBINED main ideas that go together?.	
STEP 4	NUMBERED the ideas in order?	
STEP 5	WRITTEN my summary in one paragraph?	
STEP 6	EDITED my summary?	

MAIN IDEA CHART

Name(s): _____ Date: _____

Title / Topic of Selection: _____

Paragraph	'Who' or 'what' is the paragraph about?	Most important information about 'who' or 'what'?	Main idea of paragraph

SUMMARISATION SHEET

Student name: _____ Date: _____

Text: _____

Identify 3 or 4 important main ideas from the reading:

1.

2.

3.

4.

Write a summary statement (2 - 4 sentences)

Generate 3 questions about your main ideas:

1.

2.

3.

4.