

## FOR-PD's Reading Strategy of the Month



(Developed by Smith, L. & Zygouris-Coe, V., 2006)

### Rationale:

At lunch or dinner, when presented with a magnificent salad bar from which to design the perfect salad, one may deliberate on exactly what to include and what to dismiss. Does one take carrots over croutons or tomatoes over turnips? Lettuce, or some other kind of greens, must be included as the main ingredient; how else could it be called a salad? Yet, one should not try to take everything from the salad bar or else it could lead to a disastrous conclusion where confusion, at least of the palate, would ensue.

While making the perfect salad may not be the easiest of endeavors to the hungry patron, summarization, at times, can be considered quite mystifying and puzzling to students who are not familiar with the strategy. Noted by the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) as having a solid scientific basis as a highly effective literacy strategy, it is important to realize that many students may not have been trained on how to effectively execute summarization techniques for better comprehension. It is with this knowledge that teachers must act to ensure that students are able to summarize events, text and experiences they are involved in.

Summarization can be thought of as a complex process where students spend time "restating the essence of text or an experience in as few words as possible or in a new, yet efficient, manner" (Wormeli, 2005, p. 2). In order for summarization to be effective, the student must be able to process the ideas of the passage and consider how they are related to one another. This study strategy helps readers associate text concepts into their schemata and can extend cognitive capacity (Friend, 2000). Although the selection/reduction process, similar to the salad bar scenario, is known to be part of the summarization strategy, there should also be emphasis on what is being learned as result of working through the summarization techniques.

Summarizing can be highly effective for helping students identify main ideas, generalize, remove redundancy, integrate ideas, and improve memory for what is read. It is especially worthwhile when used with other strategies such as generating questions and answering questions (NRP, 2000). Although sometimes considered similar to synthesizing, it is important to note that summarizing is more of a part of synthesizing. While creating a synthesis lends itself toward the achievement of creating a new perspective or thought out of what one is reading, summarizing provides more of an opportunity to understand and restate the text (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000).

Teachers have been asking students to summarize for many, many years. Often, when presented with the option to summarize, many students may become concerned that they will not be able to fulfill the task. They may worry they will not choose the correct information or can be unsure about what to include and what to dismiss. They may ask themselves if they really understood the topic at all. As educators, we need to consider that perhaps our students were never directly taught to summarize effectively or provided opportunities for summarization activities that lead to a clearer understanding of the material at hand. We must acknowledge that, at first, summarizing can be daunting, but that with practice and the influence of specific strategies, we can help lead our students to a successful summarization and improved comprehension.

### How to Use the Strategy:

#### Before You Begin

Before beginning to instruct students on specific strategies or procedures you may want to consider the following items suggested by Wormeli (2005) on how to first prepare your students for summarizing success.

- **Activate Students Background Knowledge**

Each student brings their own prior experiences and knowledge with them for every reading activity. They also often come with their own viewpoints and thoughts on particular topics that can lead to a variety of interpretations of the text or learning experiences. It is important to be sure that students have enough background information about the topic or subject, and that information be activated, so that there is not a breakdown in understanding.

- **Prime the Student's Brains (Setting Purpose)**

Along with activating student's prior knowledge, offering students a specific reason or goal for reading a piece of text is extremely important. Students who are given a purpose for reading are much more likely to retain information than those who do not. Helping students prepare for reading by advising them on how to create their own purpose can also be useful.

- **Identify Text Structure**

Authors structure text in a variety of ways based on content and topic. Students should be familiar with different structures as knowledge of each type can lend itself to a better understanding of how the material is presented. This can lead to a better understanding of the material itself. Ambruster, Anderson, and Ostertag (1987) found that training students to identify text structure led to students being able to create a macrostructure and create better summaries of the text. Some well-known text structures include enumeration, chronological order, compare and contrast, cause and effect, and problem and solution.

- **Following Clues**

You can help your students become conscious of text by providing direct instruction on what kind of clues they should be looking for within the text. Helping students to identify clues to meaning while reading can be very helpful in not only the summarization of text, but also in the comprehension of text. Detecting and noting the topic sentence can be extremely useful for noting the main idea of the piece of text. While sometimes located at the beginning of the paragraph, it can also be in the middle the end, or perhaps simply implied through fragments of text. The first and last sentences also can contain clues to the main points of the text.

- **Offer Tools**

Helping students become conscious and engaged about what they are reading is an important aspect of reading for meaning and summarization. "Good readers read text passages at least twice: once to get the general overview and then again to determine what is salient" (Wormeli, 2005, p. 22). Providing them practice and time to reread text will help them have a better understanding of the purpose for the reading.

Also helpful, for the preparation of summarizing, is the use of strategies like making notations and marking the text. Either writing in the margin or using sticky notes can be a great way to help students gather their thoughts while they read. These notes can help students gain insight into what is really important in the text and how they feel about it. The following chart provides text notations that students can use although they may want to take the time and opportunity to create their own (Wormeli, 2005).

<b>Text Notations for Marking Texts</b>	
<b>Ö</b>	I agree with this.
<b>X</b>	I disagree with this.
<b>??</b>	This confuses me.
<b>!!</b>	Wow!
<b>CL</b>	The statement is a general claim.
<b>EV</b>	Here is evidence for the claim.

### **Guidelines for Summarization**

There are many thoughts on how to teach students to write and create summaries. While some are geared more toward certain kinds of text or experiences, they usually all contain the use of finding the main idea, integrating information, and checking/polishing a summary to ensure a clear understanding and presentation of the material.

**It is important that summarization not be seen as only a selection and reduction process. While selection and reduction will need to be accomplished, the goal should be to create a greater understanding of material covered or experienced.**

#### **Step 1 Preview**

Have students preview the passage and ask them to think about what they expect the passage to read about. This may be a good time to offer a goal or purpose for reading. Remind students they will probably need to read the selection twice.

**Step 2 Main Idea**

After reading the text, have students ask themselves what the whole article is about and to identify the author's message about that topic. Have students generate the main idea in their own words and be observant that their thesis is general enough to encompass the whole article, but is not too vague.

**Step 3 Supporting Ideas**

Now it's time to find the details that support your thesis. These should be considered the major details of the text and be more specific than the thesis. Do not include examples, illustrations, or little anecdotes. Remember to inform your class not to repeat themselves as they write their summary. Ask students to consider any notes that were taken during the reading of the article; are these important enough to add to the summary?

**Step 4 Check and Polish**

Have students take time to review their summary and polish their thoughts. Make sure complete sentences are used and that the students used their own words are extremely important. The students should also note that the first sentence states the thesis of their summary. Use of summary words like "in conclusion" and "the main point" can be used toward the end of the summary. Students should feel they have a better understanding of what they read.

(Based on Friend, R. (2000). Teaching summarization as a content area strategy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 44 (4), 320-329.)

**Strategies**

Over the years, teachers and students have used summarization mostly within the realm of writing. While it is true that summarization works well as a writing assignment, it is important to not underestimate the instruction of summarization through dramatic, oral, visual, kinesthetic, artistic, and even musical lessons. Here are some specific strategies that can be used to aid students in the development of summarization skills (Wormeli, 2005).

**Summarization Pyramids**

This strategy makes use of a pyramid shaped graphic organizer. After a lesson or reading on a particular topic, students will generate a pyramid of short answers for their pyramid. Questions can include asking for a synonym for the topic, an analogy between the topic and a sport, some causes of the topic, some tools for using the topic, or even the effects of the topic.

Summarization Pyramid	
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**Summary Ball**

This quick-paced game offers students a kinesthetic approach to summarizing a lesson. After presenting the information to the students, by having them read it, watch it, go on a field trip, or watch a demonstration, ask students to stand at their desk. Begin by tossing a beach ball to one of your students and having them, within three seconds, state a fact, concept, or idea they learned during the lesson. That students will then throw the ball to a classmate who will offer a fact or idea she learned during the lesson. This will continue around the room and if a student cannot come up with something new that was learned, they must sit down. The winner is the last person standing who can share something they learned.

**Graphic Organizers**

There are many graphics organizers that are suitable to use in the quest for creating a great summary. The following organizer is a good choice when dealing with expository writings as the chart easily lends itself to schematic planning.

Topics and Subtopics

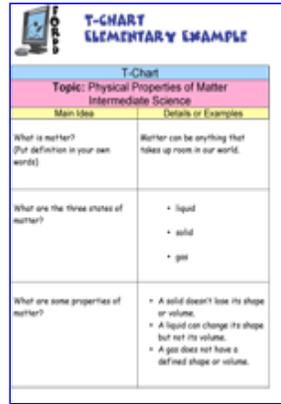
Topics and Subtopics Secondary Example

(click above to see PDF versions of a Topic/Subtopic Graphic Organzier and an example)

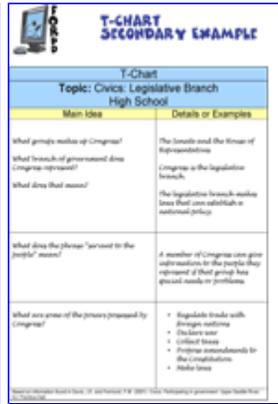
**T-Chart**

A T-Chart can be very useful to students whom you are still providing scaffolding for with regard to reading for meaning. Offering students a partially completed T-Chart, where main ideas are already offered, can help them focus on gathering information on details. As they progress you can offer them blank T-Charts where they can find their own main ideas of the text and build there summary from there. The following PDFs offer examples and a usable T-chart for you to use in your classroom.

T-Chart



Elementary Example



Example

Secondary

(click above to see PDF versions of a T-Chart and T-Chart Examples)

**Assessment:**

Assessing summarization can be completed through evaluation of both the process the students go through to gain summarization techniques and also and actual summary created by the students. Teachers should take time to check for understanding on mastery of specific strategies and exercises that are taught in the realm of summarization. These may include how to determine a topic sentence, how to write a thesis statement, how to paraphrase, and even how to evaluate the summaries created by teachers and classmates.

Teachers may benefit from a rubric designed to assess the final summary of their students. The one listed below can be used with a variety of text and grade levels.



Summarization Rubric

(click above to see PDF versions of the Summarization Rubric)

Also, the creation of a self-assessment rubric for students can be beneficial to use so students can evaluate and have a better understanding about their own summarization skills. The link below offers a self-assessment rubric used for scaffolding summarization in the middle school grades.

Self Assessment Rubric

[http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson\\_images/lesson277/rubric.pdf](http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson277/rubric.pdf)

**Resources:**

**GIST: A Summarizing Strategy for Use in Any Content Area**

[http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson\\_view.asp?id=290](http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=290)

## Summarization

Students in grades six through eight identify journalism's "5Ws and H" and use their notes to write a 20-word summary called a GIST.

### Teaching Paragraph Summarization Strategies

<http://www.specialconnections.ku.edu/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/specconn/main.php?cat=instruction&section=main&subsection=rc/paragraph>

This website offers information on the summarization strategy, how summarization helps students, the types of summarization, and how to teach paragraph summarization.

### Choosing One Word: Summarizing Shel Silverstein's "Sick"

[http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson\\_view.asp?id=893](http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=893)

Primary students will enjoy this lesson on learning on how to select the word they believe to be the important in a piece of text and justify why they chose the word.

### Scaling Back to Essentials: Scaffolding Summarization With Fishbone Mapping

[http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson\\_view.asp?id=277](http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=277)

This lesson plan is geared towards students in grades six through eight and explores the question of what's important and what's not in the text they read. Included is a use of cooperative groups, fishbone maps, and a cumulative activity on writing of summaries.

### Summarization Station

<http://www.auburn.edu/~murraba/guides/andersonrl.html>

This lesson provides step-by-step instruction on how to teach the summarization strategy for articles.

### Summarizing

<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/readquest/strat/summarize.html>

The authors of this website define summarization and offer insight into what students often do and what they should be doing. The authors suggest specific ways on how teach summarization and a link to selective underlining is included.

### Focus on Summarizing Information

[http://www.eduref.org/Virtual/Lessons/Language\\_Arts/Writing/WCP0203.html](http://www.eduref.org/Virtual/Lessons/Language_Arts/Writing/WCP0203.html)

This site provides information on different summarization activities, the steps to summarization, and how to include summarization techniques in the media center.

### Text Structure

<http://www.itrc.ucf.edu/strategies/strattextstructure.html>

FOR-PD provides information on how to use text structure in classroom with specific emphasis on expository organization.

### References:

Armbruster, B. B., Anderson, T. H., & Ostertag, J. (1987). Does text structure/summarization instruction facilitate learning from expository text? *Reading Research Quarterly*, 22, 331-346.

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Wormeli, R. (2005). *Summarization in any subject: 50 techniques to improve student learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

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