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A Content Literacy Newsletter from Regional Professional Development Program-Issue V



Simple Summaries

Summary writing is a good assessment and facilitator of reading comprehension; however, teaching effective summarizing skills is difficult. Students tend to fall into two categories: those who recopy almost the entire passage and those who focus on one point while missing the overall meaning of the passage. Using the journalistic 5Ws (who, what, when, where, why, and how), this strategy teaches students to use questions to determine importance and relevance when reading. It also encourages students to write their summaries from their answers rather than from the original source. This strategy works best when modeled with the whole class using a short newspaper article. Once the students have practiced with short articles, they should be able to use this strategy to write good, solid summaries of almost anything.

Writing the Summary

1. Begin by explaining the purpose of the lesson—learning to summarize using questions and your own words, not their words.
2. Put a transparency of a short article on the overhead and read it to your class.
3. List the 5Ws (who, what, when, where, why, and the how of the article) and fill in the details with the class. Make sure you/they don't use whole sentences; words and phrases will suffice.
4. As a class, write a one-paragraph summary using only the answers to the questions, rather than referring back to the article. NOTE: I tell my students that the only words they can use from the actual article are proper nouns and numbers.
5. Share and discuss the summaries with the class.
6. Distribute copies of another article (still short and simple) and have students read and highlight important facts independently.
7. Students should write answers to the 5Ws using only words and phrases.
8. Have your class put away their articles and write their summaries from their notes (answers to their 6 questions).
9. Once the students are comfortable with this activity, introduce longer and more complex articles. Finally, transfer this strategy to all types of text.

Editing and Revision: After the summary has been written, have students respond to the following questions/comments:

1. Is anything important left out?
2. Is the information in the right order?
3. Read each sentence aloud to insure it reads smoothly.
4. Identify and change words, phrases, or sentences that seem confusing or are difficult to read.
5. Re-read the paper and delete any unnecessary words.
6. Check the punctuation and spelling.



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