

GIST



Purpose

The GIST procedure (Generating Interactions between Schemata and Text) was developed by Cunningham to improve students' abilities to comprehend the gist of paragraphs. The GIST procedure is an effective instructional tool for guiding student summary writing, which, in turn, improves their learning from text.

Procedure

1. **Paragraph Version.** Students are asked to generate summary statements of no longer than fifteen words as they read a paragraph sentence by sentence. After reading the first sentence, they are expected to summarize what the text stated. Then as each additional sentence of a paragraph is exposed, students are expected to incorporate the additional information into a new statement of no more than fifteen words.

Step 1: Selecting appropriate paragraphs. The first step in using the procedure is to select several paragraphs, each with three to five sentences that have a gist.

For example:

The theory of how planets were formed differs from the one generally accepted a couple of decades ago. At that point, it was thought by most astronomers that the planets formed as the result of a wandering star passing too close to the sun and sucking chunks of matter out of its fiery mass. The decline of this theory occurred on the basis of new evidence and new calculation that suggested that the planets developed from random particles which grew larger as they attracted others by their gravity.

Step 2: Students read the first sentence. Step 2 involves having students read the first sentence of the paragraph for purposes of retelling it in their own words. It is recommended that the sentence be displayed on an overhead, chart, or chalkboard with fifteen blanks underneath. The blanks are the spaces in which students are expected to fit their summaries.

Step 3: Students generate summaries. In this step, students are asked to retell in a statement of fifteen or less words what they read in the sentence. Writing one word in every blank, students as a group dictate and revise the statement until they are satisfied with it. The text is put aside and the students are expected to generate their summary based upon memory. Only after generating their summary are the students encouraged to reread the text. At that time, by comparing their summary statement with the text, students are expected to decide for themselves whether they wish to revise their GIST further.

Step 4: Reading the first two sentences. The fourth step involves having students read the first and second sentence and retell them in the same number of words used for the first sentence alone.

Step 5: Generating a summary for sentence one and two. The fifth step involves having students generate a single sentence (no longer than fifteen words) that summarizes both sentences one and two.

Step 6: *Continue with the procedure for the remainder of the paragraph.*

Step 7: Moving beyond a sentence-by-sentence approach to a paragraph approach. As students develop in their ability to generate such statements across a variety of different paragraphs, move them toward the presentation of paragraphs. In addition, as students develop in their ability to generate summaries, teachers are urged to give students opportunities to produce their own GIST statements individually rather than as a group.

2. Short Passage Version. The short passage version parallels the paragraph version.

Step 1: *Selecting appropriate passages.* The teacher selects short passages of an appropriate difficulty level, each with a gist, and three to five paragraphs in length. The passage is placed on an overhead.

Step 2: *Reading the paragraph.* All the paragraphs are covered over but the first one. Twenty blank spaces are placed on a chalkboard, and the students are directed to read the paragraph so they can retell it in their own words in one statement of twenty or less words.

Step 3: *Students generate summaries.* When students have finished reading the paragraph, the overhead transparency is removed and students are asked as a group to start their summaries. Writing one word per blank, students dictate and edit the statement until it is complete. Students may review the paragraph at any time, but they are expected to dictate and edit from memory. When students feel that their statement is an accurate summary of the paragraph, the step is complete.

Step 4: *Students read and summarize subsequent paragraphs.* The chalkboard is erased, and the students proceed to read and summarize the first two paragraphs in no more than twenty words. The same procedures are used for leading them through the entire passage.

Step 5: *generating summaries for whole passages and developing independence.* Once students have had many opportunities to practice GIST first in paragraphs then in short passages they will be ready to move to generating summaries for entire texts. Continued practice and reinforcement will help students to refine their ability to summarize.