



Teaching Strategy

# Summarizing

## Description

Summarizing is part of a set of strategies called *Reciprocal Teaching* that involves peer interactions. Reciprocal teaching also includes predicting, question generating, and clarifying. Summarizing is a challenging task for most struggling readers, and is often preceded by practice in retelling and note taking. Summarizing requires that students first get the gist of a reading and then distill key points in the reading. Summarizing requires that students develop a shorter version of a longer piece that includes both the main points and essential details.

Most struggling readers have difficulty with summaries, since they may not have the literacy skills required to distill and restate ideas. To start, they may need a chance to practice paraphrasing and retelling a short text in their own words. Even at low-literacy levels, students should get the idea that just copying sentences is not an acceptable way to retell or summarize.

## Purpose

Summarizing builds comprehension skills in reading and listening by focusing students' attention on essential points. It is often used in academic work, both as a way to engage students in texts and to capture their understanding of key ideas. Although mostly used in writing, it also serves students well in team interaction in school and at work as they present the main points of a discussion to others or report an event or incident.

## What to Do

1. Introduce the importance of being able to summarize by using examples from students' lives, from work, newspapers, and from academic subjects. Show students models of summaries for films or books. Show headlines from newspapers that are a one-line summary of the story. To further build familiarity with the concept, start by summarizing an event or incident that students know about. Explain that you could go on and on retelling every detail of the event but that your audience might get impatient. Highlight that a summary saves time for listeners and readers.
2. To focus students' attention to the point of the strategy, select a text that contains familiar content, possibly a news story or a previously discussed reading. Present the information orally to make it easier for students to paraphrase and not copy.
3. Model your own summary of the text you just presented by doing a Think-Aloud. Use guiding questions (who, what, when, where, why, and how) to present key points on the board. Include a title, and a strong first sentence in your summary. Invite students to help you with this task.
4. Select a new high interest text. Ask students to read the text with you or have them listen as you present the text orally. Ask students to take notes or highlight key ideas in the text.

5. Pair up students and ask them to discuss what they've heard using their notes. Then invite them to represent the information in visual form using a graphic organizer, such as an Event Map or a Flow Chart. Circle the room and guide students if they ask for help, but don't interfere otherwise.
6. Bring the class together and work with the class as a whole to create an oral summary, guiding the group by saying something like, *What do we want to say about this topic (e.g., a short biography of Leonardo de Vinci)? What's an important point that we want to make? (e.g., Leonardo was a genius) We should probably explain that point a bit. What is our evidence that he was a genius (e.g., He was the best in his field in science, art, and inventions). What question might people have about this statement (e.g., how do you know, what are examples of what he did?)*
7. Ask students to work individually and create a summary, rephrasing the first sentence (e.g., *Leonardo may have been the smartest person ever*) and using different examples .
8. Continue the summarizing process with different kinds of texts (descriptive, sequencing, cause and effect, narratives). Keep breaking the process down into structures the students can work with and keep pushing students to focus on key information, not trivial details. Use graphic organizers to help them see relationships between details and global ideas.

### **Keep in MInd**

Summarizing is a task that is cognitively challenging. It may be best to start having students retell a multi-step event and practice telling it in its long form and then in its short form.

Students will need practice summarizing what they hear as well as summarizing what they read. News stories that grab students might be a good way to build listening skills that then get reinforced when they read about the same event and are asked to present the gist of the story. They could create a headline, for example.

Use video clips from TV or the internet that have students talking and use those as prompts for retelling and summarizing. Invite students to send an e-mail to a friend summarizing a YouTube video that they think is worth watching.