Summarizing

What is Summarizing?

Summarizing is the ability to produce a condensed version of information. The summary includes only important elements and retains the order of the original information.

Why is Summarizing Important?

Summarizing is important because it benefits both the teacher and student.

For the student

- it provides an opportunity to communicate what is important
- it serves as a way to check understanding
- it provides practice in decision making and sequencing

For the teacher

- it provides evidence of the student's ability to select important information
- it is an informal indicator of comprehension
- it reveals a student's ability to prioritize and sequence

Helping Students Develop Their Ability to Summarize

1. Explain that the purpose of summarizing is to restate information in a way that includes all the important information, is brief, and is in order.

2. Relate summary to text structure. The summary of a story will be different than the summary of expository material. Expository material may have one of the following predominant organizational patterns: descriptive, problem/solution, compare/contrast, sequential, main idea/detail, cause/effect.

3. Identify a short selection for modeling. Choose a selection that is a clear example of a particular text structure.

4. Have students read the selection with the purpose of focusing on the text structure (if text structure has been taught) and what was most important.

5. After reading, ask students to identify the text structure. Have them use the structure to create a summary.

6. To provide support for creating summaries that follow the text structure, use the Summary Checklists for Different Text Structures.

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The 50% Summary

A teaching technique that involves both summarizing and the use of text structure is the 50% Summary. To use this technique:

1. Tell students that sometimes editors for newspapers and magazines may tell a writer that they must reduce a selection to certain length for publishing, while keeping the most important information.

2. Display a transparency of selection for Thomas Edison (see below). The task was to reduce the article on the left to 50% or half of its original length, but still have important information about Thomas Edison. The column on the right shows how someone shortened the article to about half of the original length. Tell students that the original article is mostly a description on Edison's life written in chronological order.

3. Demonstrate how the reduction was made. Ask the students to read the information in first paragraph of both columns. Then ask them to try and match information in the summary to information in the original article. Highlight or underline content in the original column that matches information in the summary. For example, you could highlight or underline, in the original text, "Thomas Alva Edison was one of the greatest inventors of the 19th century."

4. Ask students to help you find additional matches to highlight or underline. When you feel the students are understanding the process, have then continue highlighting or underlining the matches. They could work in groups of four, pairs, or individually.

5. When the process has been completed, turn the students attention to the content in the original that was not highlighted or underlined. Engage them in a discussion of whether that material was justifiably omitted. Ask them to defend or justify their opinions.

6. Now turn the discussion to sequence. Did the summary maintain the order of information in the original?

7. To provide additional practice, identify other short expository pieces that have a predominant text structure. Place the original in a column format like the "Edison' piece. Ask students in groups, pair, or individually to produce a 50% summary. Students can later exchange papers, use the highlight or underlining technique, and discuss whether the summaries still contained important information.

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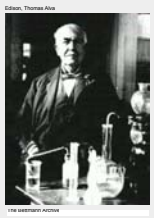
USING TEXT STRUCTURES TO CREATE SUMMARIES

Since a summary is a condensed version of a longer body of information, it should reflect the organization of the original piece. For example, if the selection was a story, an effective summary would include the main story parts. In an expository selection, the organization would be quite different. If the selection was mainly sequential and descriptive, the summary would reflect that organization.



Thomas Alva Edison was one of the greatest inventors of the 19th century. He is most famous for inventing the light bulb in 1879. He also developed the world's first electric light-power station in 1882.

Edison was born in the village of Milan, Ohio, on Feb. 11, 1847. His family later moved to Port Huron, Michigan. He went to school for only three months, when he was seven. After that, his mother taught him at home. Thomas loved to read. At twelve years old, he became a train-boy, selling magazines and candy on the Grand Trunk Railroad. He spent all his money on books and equipment for his experiments.

At the age of fifteen, Edison became manager of a telegraph office. His first inventions helped improve the telegraph, an early method for sending messages over electric wires. At twenty-one, Edison produced his first major invention, a stock ticker for printing stock-exchange quotes. He was paid $40,000 for this invention. He took this money and opened a manufacturing shop and small laboratory in Newark, N. J. Later he gave up manufacturing, and moved his laboratory to Menlo Park, New Jersey. At this laboratory, he directed other inventors.

During the rest of his life he and his laboratory invented the phonograph, film for the movie industry, and the alkaline battery. By the time he died at West Orange, New Jersey on Oct. 18, 1931, he had created over 1,000 inventions.

Adapted from Grolier Electronic Publishing, Inc., 1995

Type of Text Structure

Sequential/Descriptive

Sample Summary

Thomas Edison was one of America's greatest inventors. He was born in Ohio in 1847. He had very little schooling, but loved to read and invent things.

As he was growing up, he sold magazines and candy on trains. Later, he worked in a telegraph office. During that time he began to develop and sell a number of inventions.

He used the money he made to open up a manufacturing shop and laboratory. Later he opened just a laboratory in Menlo Park, New Jersey.

He and his laboratory invented many devices including the phonograph, movie film, and the alkaline battery. By the time he died in 1931, he had created over 1,000 inventions.

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