



Support: Summary Writing to Develop Comprehension

ELA	Science	Social Studies
<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ develop or build comprehension when reading a text, listening to a recording or watching a film→ when writing a summary sentence for a brief summary→ when writing an extended summary response where students are asked to summarize a piece of text and include text evidence and examples to support their summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ develop or build comprehension when obtaining or evaluating information from scientific texts, recordings, or visual representations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ develop or build comprehension when reading a text, listening to a recording or watching a film

Who could this support?

Students who need more support with comprehension can develop that skill through writing summaries. It trains them to pull out the most essential information, and details to support the essential information.

Purpose:

- to develop reading comprehension skills
- to help students extract the most important information from a text (written, visual, or auditory)

Communicating the purpose:

It is very important to communicate the purpose of the strategy with the students so that they know what they are doing and why. This helps with motivation and buy-in for the lesson and topic.

Process

Prework

- Pre-read the selected text so that you can become familiar with the words/ideas and you know what you want students to pull from the text. Also, search for places where students may struggle, anticipate the struggle, and plan for it. For text with heavy domain-specific vocabulary, consider some work with words before reading by selecting the “Direct and Explicit Vocab Instruction” document from the Content Literacy documents for the students. Be sure to follow the guidelines if you are teaching from an exploratory curriculum by not front-loading Tier III vocabulary. See Direct and Explicit Vocab Instruction document for more information. Consider teaching the [Annotating](#) strategy prior to the reading strategies so that students know best practices while reading.



Process (continued)

Step 1

Model finding the topic sentence of the passage, and point out where the topic sentence can be found. When modeling, do a think-aloud of how you knew it was the topic sentence. Model finding them in different places throughout lessons by annotating the text so that students can have different experiences finding them. If there is no topic sentence, show students how to find the main idea from the first paragraph or the first sentence or two of the paragraph. The topic or main idea can be found by asking yourself, “Who or what is this selection about?”

- Topic sentences are usually the first sentence of a paragraph, but not always.
- Sometimes they can be found within the paragraph and again at the end.
- Other times it is implied and the student needs to put all the key details together to determine what they all have in common and what the selection is about.

Step 2

Model finding key details. Key details guide us to a full understanding of the topic, and are what the text is mainly about. The model should be an explicit model where you annotate in the text and underline or highlight the key detail. Do a think-aloud, where you talk through your thinking on how you knew that was a key detail, so that students can use that same line of thinking when it is their turn to locate a key detail.

Supporting details can also answer the questions *who*, *what*, *when*, *why* and *how* about the topic.

Model finding key details in several types of text, including but not limited to:

- comparisons
- contrasts
- statistics
- graphs
- quotations from authorities
- vivid descriptions

Supporting details could come in the form of:

- facts
- statements
- examples

Step 3

Have students write the topic sentence in their own words as the first part of their summary. Then have them choose the best 2-3 supporting details that truly help to describe the topic.

I know I'm successful when...

- Students are able to fill out the curriculum-based graphic organizer or answer the question(s) that are asked that day by the end of the lesson. Students will start to recognize some of the words read and begin reading your content-area text with the appropriate fluency and develop comprehension of main ideas.



Additional Considerations

Some students may need additional support, which could include:

- sentence stems that start the main idea sentence for them, as well as the transition words between sentences of the key details already being filled in.
- collaborative groupings where students of mixed abilities assist in the creation of the summary prior to any independent practice.
- small group instruction where the teacher continues to model and give guided practice and feedback for students who need more support with writing their summaries.

References

Langan, John. "Main Ideas and Supporting Details." *Ten Steps to Advancing College Reading Skills*, Townsend Press, West Berlin, NJ, 2015, pp. 14–37.

Sedita, Joan. "How To Write A Summary." Keys to Literacy.

<https://keystoliteracy.com/wp-content/pdfs/5b-wkshp-templates/how-to-write-a-summary.pdf>.