



Literacy at Hartford Public High School

March 21, 2005
Volume 2 Number 27

Summarizing

from Classroom Instruction that Works
by Robert Marzano, et al.

Summarizing is a useful skill for students to master. Research indicates that several points are critical.

1. To effectively summarize, students must delete some information, substitute some information, and keep some information.
2. To effectively delete, substitute, and keep information, students must analyze the information on a fairly deep level.
3. Being aware of the explicit structure of information is an aid to summarizing information.

One summarizing strategy is referred to as a rule-based summary strategy. The rules are as follows:

1. Delete trivial material that is unnecessary to understanding.
2. Delete redundant material.
3. Substitute superordinate terms for lists (e.g., “flowers” for “daisies, tulips, and roses.”).
4. Select a topic sentence, or invent one if it is missing.

Remember: simply directing students what to do is not the same as showing them how to do it. Modeling the strategy in detail is very important.

Summary Frames

A summary frame provides a series of questions that the teacher provides to the students. These questions are designed to highlight the critical elements for specific types of information.

The Topic-Restriction-Illustration Frame

T-R-I stands for topic, restriction, and illustration. This pattern is commonly found in expository material. This type of frame contains the following elements:

Topic (T)—general statement about the topic to be discussed

Restriction—limits the information in some way

Illustrations (I)—exemplifies the topic or restriction

The T-R-I pattern can have a number of restrictions or additional illustrations.

Frame questions include

1. T—What is the general statement of the topic?
2. R—What information narrows or restricts the general statement or topic?
3. I—What examples illustrate the topic or restriction?

Example from a geography class:

Ms. Burke uses the T-R-I frame as he presents information about the topic of interdependence of trade among nations. He first presents the students with the following frame questions:

1. T—What is the meaning of “trade”?
2. R—How does the definition of trade vary from different countries (e.g., in industrialized or in developing countries)?
3. I—What examples illustrate this?
4. R—How can a short-term positive balance of trade negatively affect long-term trade in developing countries?
5. I—What examples illustrate this?

Next, in a lecture format he presents information about trade. Occasionally, he stops and asks students to fill in answers to the frame questions based on the information he has presented. For homework, students translate the answers to their frame questions into a summary paragraph.

Think of how you might use this frame in your classes.

- What key terms do your students need to understand in order to comprehend the topic you are presenting?
- How could your students use this material with written text, rather than a lecture?
- How might students use the summaries that they write using this frame?
- How would you model this strategy in order to provide scaffolding for your students?