

Summarization Strategy for Reading Comprehension

Comprehension of written passages often demands that the child see how different parts of the story are connected. Making and understanding the connections between parts of a story and seeing the big picture requires that the child understand how all of the facts are related to one another. A reading strategy that teaches children to see how the parts of a story are connected will help them better understand the text. The technique called *summarization* is such a method. Because not all students learn how to summarize a story on their own, it is necessary to specifically teach some children how to do this.

Summarization is an effective strategy to help students enhance understanding of what is read. The method requires that a student rewrite or outline only the important parts of a passage. Summarization encourages a student to look for the most important parts and determine what parts of a story are less important and what should be ignored. This also helps students see how different parts of a story relate to each other, including how parts of the text fit with the title or main topic.

How to Teach Summarization

When students need help, the teacher should encourage them to use modified or elaborated methods of summarization that best fit the students and the situation. The first step is to show the students how to summarize a story (i.e., model the strategy).

- Ask the students for the overall idea of the selected reading.
- Have the students help write a general statement about the story.
- Ask them to list the main ideas with two or three supporting ideas for each main idea.
- Give each part of the story a heading and record important details that the students help to identify.
- Ask the students what information is and is not important.
- Ask the students to describe the parts of the passage.
- Relate the important parts of the passage to the main topic and/or the title.
- Have the students write a summary that includes each of these parts.
- Have the students check the summary against what was read to see if anything important was left out.

The second step is to allow the students to practice summarization with help.

- Guide the students to underline or circle the most important parts.
- Encourage the students to look back in the text and scan (but not reread everything).
- Encourage the use of overall or general labels for information (e.g., ducks, cows, sheep, and chickens are barnyard animals).
- Instruct the students to write down important ideas, order the ideas by importance, and ignore unimportant information.

The final step is to encourage the independent use of the summarization strategy.

- Students should independently perform the activities in Step 2.
- Have students check each other's summaries.
- Each student should check his or her own summary for key components.

After the strategy has been taught and monitored, the steps can be given to students or posted in the room as a reminder of how to use the summarization strategy. It is also important that students practice the summarization strategy and get feedback from the teacher about the quality of their summaries. Some other guidelines for teachers follow:

- Use direct explanation. Teach why, when, and where to apply summarization strategies.
- Model skills. Talk through examples and show how the skill is applied.
- Break down complicated parts into small steps.
- Summarize short paragraphs before proceeding to longer passages.
- Phase out teacher direction and phase in student use throughout instruction.

Who Should Learn Summarization?

Summarization is likely to benefit students who score low in reading comprehension. Because this intervention helps children see how the parts are all connected, it involves Simultaneous processing. Students who have a Simultaneous processing weakness may have a particularly difficult time reading for understanding or comprehending all the parts of a story and how they relate to each other. This technique may also be used with children who have a Planning weakness. It helps them approach reading in a more strategic (i.e., planful) way that prompts them in a step-by-step manner to look for important and related parts of a story.

Resources

- Kirby, J.R., & Williams, N.H. (1991). *Learning problems: A cognitive approach*. Toronto: Kagan & Woo Limited.
- McCormick, S. (1995). *Instructing students who have literacy problems*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Naglieri, J.A. (1999). *Essentials of CAS assessment*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Pressley, M.P., & Woloshyn, V. (1995). *Cognitive strategy instruction that really improves children's academic performance* (2nd ed.). Brookline, MA: Brookline Books.