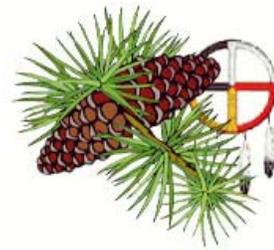


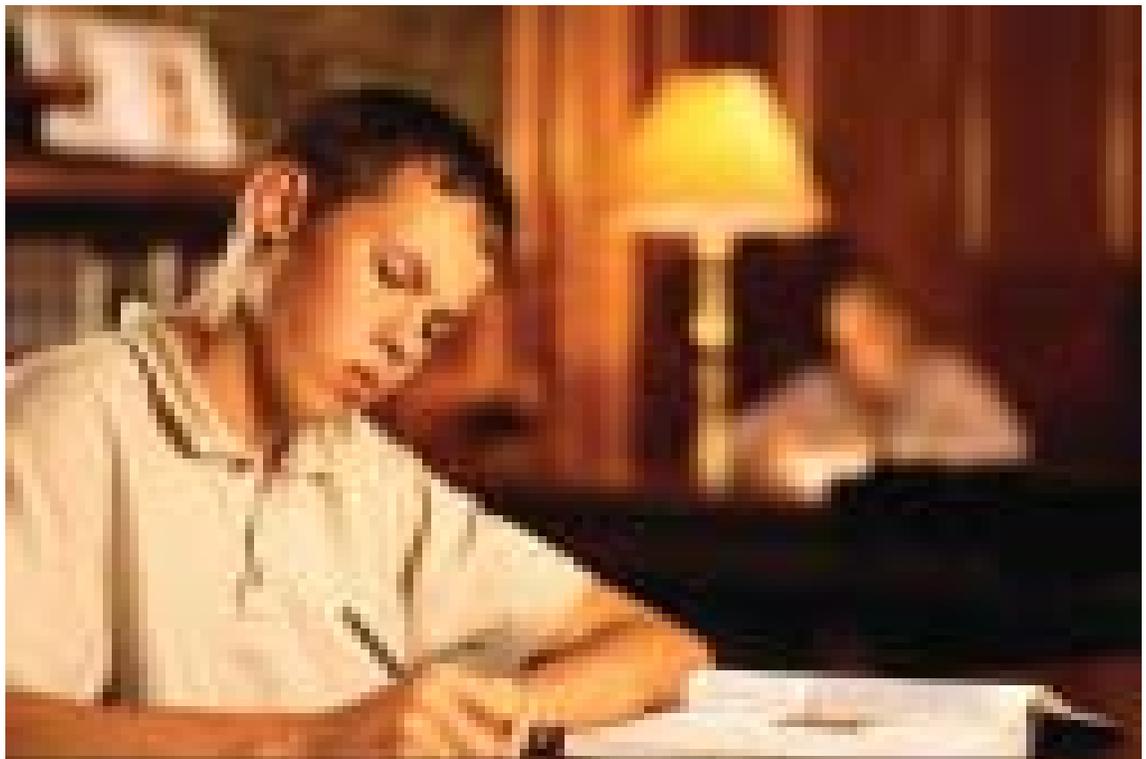
On Target:

Bringing Writing into Content Area Classrooms

Grades 4 - 12



ESA Regions 6 & 7



Dear Educators,

Just as educators are encouraged to include reading activities into their daily lessons—regardless of the content area—more and more emphasis has been placed on bringing student writing into all classrooms and subject areas. Frequently, when we think of writing, we think of the big projects: research papers, book reports, essays, short stories, and other formal tasks. While a written project remains an excellent way for teachers to assess learning, it is neither the only nor the easiest method of giving students the opportunity to express their skills via the writing process.

This booklet focuses on strategies that cause students to think reflectively and analytically as they deepen their understanding of content materials and express themselves through writing. The strategies selected are ones that both teachers and students can bring into their daily routines. Although some of the strategies can be building blocks for long-term projects, many of them stand alone as ways for students to access prior knowledge or reflect on their learning.

On Target: Bringing Writing into Content Area Classrooms is the seventh in the *On Target* series of booklets compiled by South Dakota's Education Service Agencies with support from the South Dakota Department of Education. Previous booklets in the *On Target* series are available through your ESA or at the following ESA 6 & 7 website:

<http://www.sdesa6.org/content/projects.htm>. *On Target* booklets include the following titles:

- *On Target: Reading Strategies to Guide Learning*
- *On Target: Strategies to Help Struggling Readers*
- *On Target: Strategies to Improve Student Test Scores*
- *On Target: Strategies to Help Readers Make Meaning through Inferences.*
- *On Target: Strategies to Build Student Vocabularies*
- *On Target: More Strategies to Guide Learning*

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Finding a Place for Writing in Each and Every Classroom

By Josephine Hartmann
TIE Literacy Consultant

I love to write. Every word reaches out to the world and shares part of me with people I shall never meet. I acknowledge, however, that few people in our country share this enthusiasm for the beauty, precision, and utility of the written language.

“Oh, yeah, yeah! You started out as an English teacher. Of course you’re going to advertise your own product,” you’re probably thinking. But consider this. In 1988, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) announced that one of their newly minted “Standards” was that students should **write** about mathematics. A collective shudder of shock and horror could be felt from coast to coast. But, nevertheless, the point had been made.

Writing is a kind of deep thinking. Writing is organizing one’s ideas on a given topic. Writing is sorting out the main ideas from the chaff of details. Writing improves student learning and aids in retaining both content and meaning.

When we write, we translate our thoughts about a given topic into our own language. The finished product is a mystical blend of the new ideas we have just read or heard and our own interpretation of them in terms meaningful to us and to our peers. Our pencil translates strange new material into meaningful pathways to learning.

Do I hear you muttering, “I’m no Shakespeare, and I don’t expect my students to be, either. I teach science (or social studies, or math, or art, or family and consumer science or music or physical education)”? However, the written word sends a strong message to the reader about who we are and what we know and value. Students can learn to think about our content by wielding a pen or making their fingers fly across the keyboard as they blend new ideas with old experiences.

We tend to think of writing as creating poetry or novels or high-flying plays and movie scripts. Not so! Think of the reading we undertake each day as part of our daily lives. How many items did you read this morning? The newspaper stories and ads, the news that crawls across the bottom of the TV screen, the instruction manual for a new appliance, the road signs as we drive, the instructions for our new medication, our e-mail? The list goes on and on. Somebody writes those words. Somebody tried to transmit meaning in those cryptic symbols. Most of the reading we do each day is nonfiction.

Writing belongs in each and every classroom. The ability to express oneself with the written word is becoming increasingly important in this age of technology and high-speed communications. Wars begin with misplaced words. Misunderstandings arise with inept and bungled writing. Students need to learn how to write clearly and succinctly in every content area to survive and thrive in the 21st century.

Not only is writing the mark of an educated man or woman, it is a vital tool for learning, and it belongs as a central piece in every teacher’s lesson plans in every school in this nation.

Wait! So, Now I Have to Teach Writing, Too?

On top of everything else—content standards, No Child Left Behind, reading in the content areas—it seems that at some point, a teacher ought to be able to say, “OK, enough already. My plate is full.” But, it’s important not to draw that distinction at the point where writing crosses into content areas. Make room on the plate for writing, and perhaps dessert will be yours. Fact of the matter is that writing, like reading, has a place in all content areas.

The good news is that content area teachers really aren’t being asked to teach writing. Rather, the goal is for writing to be an integral part of all content areas. The majority of the writing instruction continues to take place in language arts classrooms. However, the reinforcement of those writing lessons and the practice of writing must take place in classrooms across the curriculum. As a result, it’s important for all content area teachers to know the language of writing, especially the methods of 6+1 Trait® Writing and the Writing Process.



Still need convincing? Steve Peha, president of Teaching That Makes Sense, Inc., lists the following reasons why writing must appear in all content areas:

1. Written output is a great way to assess student knowledge.

- Writing is a simple, efficient, cost-effective way for students to show their knowledge of a topic or lesson.
- Writing is also the simplest way for teachers to get a glimpse of student thinking and processing.

2. Writing is the essential skill students need as they enter adult life.

- When students are taught to write well, they are better able to sort through the complicated ideas and concepts that they will need to master as they mature.
- Writing is a tool that helps students make sense of their education and their lives.

3. Helping students learn to confidently express themselves in all content areas can contribute to improved behavior and self-esteem.

- When teenagers are unable to express themselves, they risk losing a sense of well-being. Writing provides an outlet for self-expression.

4. Students who write clearly, think clearly.

- Students who think clearly are better able to navigate through the obstacles of adolescence.

5. Writing is power.

- Peha explains that writing is a powerful tool that allows students to “control their lives, shape their futures, and define their dreams.”

Source:

Peha, Steve. “Writing Across the Curriculum.” *Teaching That Makes Sense*. 6 June 2006
< <http://www.ttms.org/index.htm>>.

6+1 Trait® Writing

South Dakota's Department of Education has endorsed the use of the 6+1 Trait® of Writing. Developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, the following model introduces and defines each of the traits. For more information on the traits and for suggestions on how to use the traits in your classroom, check the following websites.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's 6+1® Trait Writing:
<http://www.nwrel.org/assessment/department.php?d=1>

South Dakota Department of Education's 6+1 Writing Traits Across the Curriculum:
<http://doe.sd.gov/curriculum/6plus1/acrosscurriculum.asp>

6+1 Trait® Analytical Model for Writing Assessment



1. Ideas

Ideas are the heart of the message, the content of the piece, the main theme, together with the details that enrich and develop that theme.



2. Organization

Organization is the internal structure, the thread of central meaning, the logical and sometimes intriguing pattern of the ideas within a piece of writing.



3. Voice

Voice is the heart and soul, the magic, the wit, along with the feeling and conviction of the individual writer coming out through the words.



4. Word Choice

Word choice is the use of rich, colorful, precise language that moves and enlightens the reader.



5. Sentence Fluency

Sentence fluency is the rhythm and flow of the language, the sound of word patterns, the way in which the writing plays to the ear – not just to the eye.

“? ! @”

have, has, had

6. Conventions

Conventions are like the mechanical correctness of the piece – spelling, paragraphing, grammar and usage, punctuation, and use of capitals.



+1. Presentation

Presentation zeros in on the form and layout of the text and its readability: the piece should be pleasing to the eye.

Adapted from Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

6+1 Trait® Writing

6+1 Trait® Writing Assessment & the Writing Process



Adapted from Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Learning Logs

Too often, writing is seen as an end product, the culmination of a unit of study or research. However, writing is effectively utilized in a classroom when it becomes a part of the class pattern. Incorporate daily reflective writing, rather than polished or published student writing, into the classroom by building time for Learning Log entries into the daily routine.



Steps:

1. Learning Log entries can be assigned at any time by selecting an element of a unit or reading that you want students to explore and reflect upon.
2. Give students a topic (see suggestions below) and allow them “think time” of three to five minutes.
3. After students have reflected, ask them to record their thoughts, ideas, questions, and comments in their Learning Log.

Adaptations:

- In *Strategies to Engage the Mind of the Learner*, Rachel Billmeyer suggests providing students with a framework for recording their Learning Log thoughts. The process takes the student from pre-reading to after-reading analysis. She suggests dividing a sheet of paper into four boxes and labeling each box with the following labels:
 - My prediction for the reading. . .
 - Questions I’m asking as I read. . .
 - My summary of the reading. . .
 - I agree/disagree (or support/do not support) the information because. . .
- The Learning Log format can be adapted for various content areas. See page 9 for an approach to using Learning Logs in math classrooms.
- Use Learning Logs prior to a lesson to explore students’ background knowledge of a topic.
- Before assigning students to work in cooperative groups, give them think and write time to consider the topics to be discussed in the group setting.
- Allow students to create Learning Logs with their computers.

Possible Learning Log Topics:

- What did you find most interesting in today’s lesson?
- What questions remain after today’s lesson?
- If you were creating a test over _____, what questions might you ask? Include the answers in your response.
- Pretend your best friend was absent from class today. Bring him or her up-to-date on the material covered in class.
- Predict what you think will happen in tomorrow’s lab experiment.
- Express your opinion regarding today’s topic. (Note: This suggestion works best when a high interest lesson is being studied—one that students are likely to have strong opinions about.)

Sources:

Billmeyer, Rachel. *Strategies to Engage the Mind of the Learner*. Omaha: Dayspring, 2003, 76-79.

Billmeyer, Rachel, and Mary Lee Barton. *Teaching Reading in the Content Areas: If Not Me, Then Who?* 2nd ed. Aurora, CO: McRel, 1998, 148-150.

Buehl, Doug. *Classroom Strategies for Interactive Learning*. 2nd ed. Newark, DE: IRA, 2001, 78-79.

Learning Logs in Mathematics

Although typically used in other content areas, Learning Logs can easily be adapted for use in mathematics-based content classes. In *Teaching Reading in Mathematics*, authors Mary Lee Barton and Clare Heidema suggest a process for incorporating Learning Logs into various math lessons.

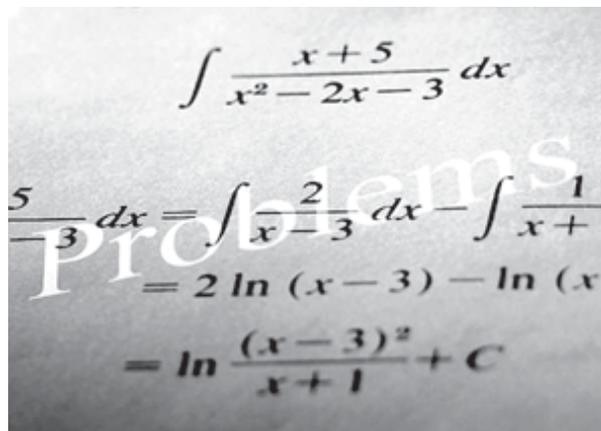
Far from being a time-waster, the logs provide students with a format to expand their conceptual thinking and to examine math processes at a deeper level. The authors explain that when students develop explanations through writing, they come to better understand a concept.

Learning Logs can be adapted for use before, during, or after a lesson. Possible log topics include the following:

- Write a story problem that requires the problem solver to use division.
- In what ways are division and subtraction similar?
- How can you calculate $192 - 59$ in your head?
- Explain in words how you go about figuring the percent correct that you earned on a test.

Steps:

1. Assign a topic for students to journal. Remember that the topic can be assigned before, during, or after the concept has been studied.
2. Give students “think time” to mull over ideas.
3. Give students writing time to explore their ideas.
4. Encourage students to share their ideas.
5. Provide students with reflection time later in a unit of study to revise and/or add to their original thinking.


$$\int \frac{x+5}{x^2-2x-3} dx$$
$$\frac{5}{3} dx = \int \frac{2}{x-3} dx - \int \frac{1}{x+1}$$
$$= 2 \ln(x-3) - \ln(x+1)$$
$$= \ln \frac{(x-3)^2}{x+1} + C$$

Source:

Barton, Mary Lee, and Clare Heidema. *Teaching Reading in Mathematics*. 2nd ed. Aurora, CO: McRel, 2002, pages 132-133.

Math Journals

Over the years, many teachers discover that we don't really learn things until we have to teach them. The process of explaining concepts and algorithms to students is what fixes the learning in our heads.

Students are the same. They think if they memorize the facts and get the right answer, that is sufficient. Writing about mathematics can liberate students from that notion. If they are to understand the mathematical concepts and processes, they need to explain what they did and how they did it. Therefore, Math Journals, which are basically an extension of the Learning Log concept (see page 8) help students become aware of what they do and do not know, can and cannot do. They connect their prior knowledge to the current topic of study. They summarize their knowledge, they raise questions, they think about what they know, and most importantly, they construct mathematics for themselves.

How do we go about journaling?

If you haven't done this before, expect students to complain: "This isn't English class." However, most are quite responsive to SHORT assignments. Five minutes at the beginning of class can be very productive. Ask questions such as:

- Describe what we did in class yesterday.
- Explain what went wrong with problem 3 on the test.
- Discuss the most difficult homework problem.

With time, students might:

- Explore the relative merits of two different procedures.

With younger or struggling students:

- Which is the better way to solve the problem?
- Write a letter to an absent classmate explaining what we did today.

Adaptations:

- Ask students to write you a short note on the back of the homework or seatwork paper:
 - Was the assignment easy or difficult?
 - Is there anything you don't understand?
 - Which was the most difficult problem?
 - Did you learn anything new?
- Ask students to develop a list of the main ideas, definitions of new terms, and descriptions of new methods any time they have a reading assignment from a math text.
- Compare and contrast different procedures.
 - What do you like/dislike about each method?
 - Which method do you prefer?
- Use sentence stem prompts:
 - To study for a math test, I . . .
 - Factoring is easy if. . .
 - I think calculators. . .
 - Math is like. . .
 - The trouble with math is. . .
 - Prime numbers are. . .
 - I can do word problems when. . .

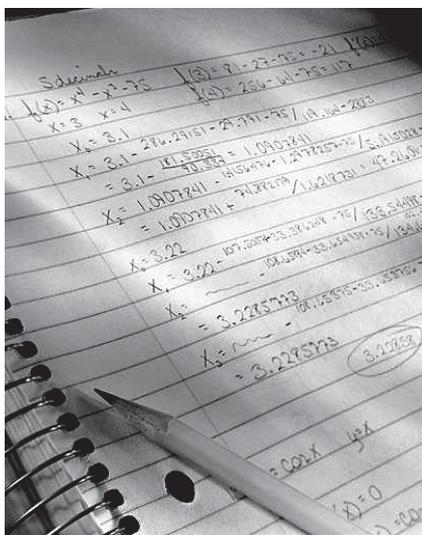
Math Journals

Adaptations: (cont.)

- A math autobiography can give us surprising results. Everyone has a “history” of their math learning and experiences, sometimes going back to our pre-school days. Students may have memories of learning fractions, long division, pop quizzes, word problems, and problems with words. Their relationship with the world of numbers over time can yield a wealth of information about their current learning capacities and challenges. Ask a question like:
 - Tell me about your triumphs and disasters in math. Go back as far as you can remember. What did you like about learning math? What do you not like?

If a math autobiography is introduced at the beginning of the year, it gives students a chance to write about what they know best – themselves! This helps them zero in on things like how they learn best, what works and doesn’t work for them, what was funny and what was a real turn-off. This activity can establish the climate for learning for the rest of the year as teachers gain insight into their students and adjust their teaching styles accordingly.

- Finally, while this isn’t journaling, it does encourage students to explain in writing. Teachers can ask test questions that require a written response such as:
 - Explain how to subtract one integer from another if their signs are different.



Sources:

- Barton, Mary Lee. *Teaching Reading in Mathematics*. Aurora, CO: McRel, 2002.
- Countryman, Joan. *Writing to Learn Mathematics*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992.
- Germain-McCarthy, Yvelyne, and Owens, Katharine. *Mathematics and Multi-Ethnic Students*, Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education, 2005.
- Pappas, Theoni. *Math Talk*. San Carlos, CA: Wide World Publishing/Tetra, 1991.
- Pugalee, David K. *Writing to Develop Mathematical Understanding*. Norwood, MA: Christopher Gordon Publishers, 2005.
- Thiessen, Dianne. ed. *Exploring Mathematics Through Literature*. Reston, VA: NCTM, 2004.

Think-Ink-Pair-Share

The Think-Ink-Pair-Share strategy helps students develop their critical thinking skills while bringing writing into content classroom instruction in a way that is non-threatening yet meaningful for students. The strategy helps students in the following critical thinking areas: making predictions, problem solving, decision making, and consensus building.

Steps:

1. Assign students to teams or partners. Provide students with a template (see following page) that allows them to record thoughts and ideas as they go through the process.
2. Provide students with a content-related article or passage. You could provide students with a question to research or consider. Author Rachel Billmeyer suggests the following content area examples:
 - Physical Education/Health – Aspects of positive sportsmanship
 - Social Studies – Impact of the Transcontinental Railroad
 - Science – Cell division (its importance and/or how it works)
 - Language Arts – Major themes from a novel, connection of the theme to contemporary events
 - Health – Characteristics of a healthy diet
 - Math – Characteristics of an equation with an example
 - Music – Influence of jazz on society
3. Allow students time to quietly consider the article, topic, or question (Think).
4. Provide students with an allotted amount of time to write their response (Ink their thinking). Billmeyer suggests the following options:
 - If working with a partner, each partner independently writes a response that reflects their thinking.
 - If working as a team, students discuss their responses with a partner, then together the pair writes (Inks) a response that will be shared with the team.
5. Share written responses with a partner or team.
6. Discuss and compare responses as a class.

Adaptations:

Annenberg Media's Journey North website suggests an alternative process for using the Think-Ink-Pair-Share method. After students finish a reading selection, ask them to think about the information. Tell the students to write two key idea words. The words do not need to form a phrase; they can be unrelated to each other.

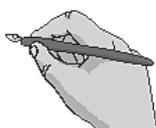
- **Think:** Why did you choose these two words?
- **Ink:** Write the reasons for your choice.
- **Pair:** Find a partner.
- **Share:** Share the two words with your partner and explain why they stood out or were important to you.

Think-Ink-Pair-Share

Think



Ink



Pair



Share



Adapted from Rachel Billmeyer's *Strategies to Engage the Mind of the Learner*, 2003

Sources:

Billmeyer, Rachel. *Strategies to Engage the Mind of the Learner: Building Strategic Learners*. Omaha: Dayspring, 2003, 224-25.

"Introduction to Teaching Strategies." *Instructional Framework*. Area Education Agency 267, Cedar Falls, IA. 8 June 2004. 6 June 2006

< <http://www.aea267.k12.ia.us/framework/strategies/>>.

"Two-Word Reflection and Think-Ink-Pair-Share. *40 Best Instructional Practices*. Annenberg Media and Journey North. 6 June 2006

< <http://www.learner.org/jnorth/tm/InstrucStrat36.html>>.

Inquiry Chart (I-Chart)

Inquiry Charts or I-Charts provide a framework for students to use as they examine and study critical questions about a topic. Students begin by considering what they already know about the topic, their background knowledge, followed by research designed to answer questions related to a topic.

Steps:

1. Choose a topic related to content study. When introducing the process, select a topic guaranteed to generate a great deal of student interest and curiosity.
2. Ask the class to generate questions related to the topic. Encourage students to create open-ended questions that require exploration and deeper levels of thinking. As a class, select three or four question areas for further exploration and research.
3. On an overhead or projection device, write the question areas using the framework provided on the following page. Provide students with a copy of the framework so they can record their observations and learnings.
4. In each of the question areas, write one of the selected questions generated by the class.
5. Label the last two columns:
 - Other Interesting Facts covers information students share that is not directly related to any of the questions.
 - New Questions provides a place for students to record additional questions and ideas that they come upon as they conduct their research.
6. Explain to students that the remaining rows are provided for them to record information they think they already know and key ideas they gather from sources they studied. When you first introduce the process, provide students with specific sources to research. After students have become skilled at I-Charts, allow them to conduct their own research.
7. Decide how you want your students to conduct their research. Students can research independently, in pairs, or in assigned teams.
8. Advise students to use the questions as their research guides. For each source, they should attempt to answer the guiding question.
9. After all sources have been consulted, tell students to write a summary of each source's information.
10. Direct students to place interesting information not directly related to the questions, in the Other Interesting Facts column.
11. Also, allow them to add additional interesting questions and their answers in the final column.
12. Direct students to compile summary information into a research report.
 - Each column could become a paragraph for the report.
 - For a longer report or research project, each column could be expanded into an entire section with specific details and examples.

Inquiry Chart (I-Chart)

Topic:	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Other Interesting Facts	New Questions
What I know:						
Source 1:						
Source 2:						
Source 3:						
Summaries:						

Adapted from Hoffman, 1992, and Buehl, 2001

Sources:

Buehl, Doug. *Classroom Strategies for Interactive Learning*. Newark, DE: IRA, 2001, 67-69.

Hoffman, James V. "Critical Reading/Thinking Across the Curriculum: Using I-Charts to Support Learning." *Language Arts* 69 (1992): 122-127.

Jones, Raymond C. "Inquiry Chart." *ReadingQuest.org: Making Sense in Social Studies*. Curry School of Education, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA. 7 Nov. 2001. 9 June 2006
<<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/readquest/strat/ichart.html>>.

Writing Summaries

Seems simple. Read a chapter. Write a summary. Students see the “write a summary” command on assignments, worksheets, and in testing situations. Sometimes the language varies; sometimes we ask students to paraphrase; other times we ask them for the main idea. Bottom line, we want our students to extract the important elements from a piece of text. We want them to get at the heart of the matter, and we want them to do it in as few words as possible. Unfortunately, we sometimes forget that they need to be taught “how” to break down a larger piece of text into a short, concise summary. It’s not easy. Writing summaries requires students to apply higher-level thinking skills. For example, students must analyze the information and synthesize it before they can condense it.

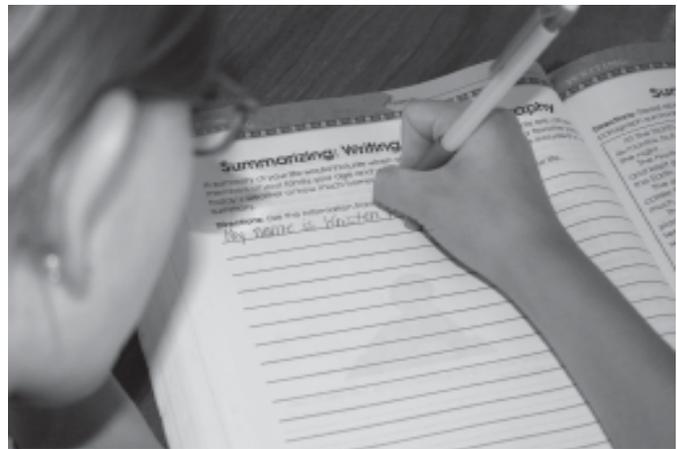
Basically, when we summarize, we take larger selections of text and reduce them to their bare essentials. What are the bare essentials? On the ReadingQuest.org website, Raymond Jones defines the bare essentials as the gist, the key ideas, and the main points worth remembering.

What do we really want students to accomplish when we ask them to summarize? Jones suggests that students begin to develop strong summarization skills when they are able to consistently complete the following tasks:

- Strip away the redundant and extraneous examples
- Focus on the heart of the matter
- Seek key words and phrases that manage to capture the gist
- Save the main ideas and crucial details that support them

Easier said than done. Without explicit instruction, Jones says, students are much more likely to take the following routes:

- Write down everything
- Write down next to nothing
- Write way too much
- Don’t write enough
- Copy word-for-word



Photograph by Ryan Phillips

Sources:

Jones, Raymond. “Summarizing.” *ReadingQuest.org: Making Sense in Social Studies*. Curry School of Education, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA. 7 Nov. 2001. 9 June 2006
<<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/readquest/strat/summarize.html>>.

Marzano, Robert J., et al. *A Handbook for Classroom Instruction that Works*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2001.
Marzano, Robert J., Debra J. Pickering and Jane E. Pollock. *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2001.

Wormeli, Rick. *Summarization in Any Subject: 50 Techniques to Improve Student Learning*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2005.

Journalists' Questions

Long before students sit down to write their summaries, they have to categorize the information they've read. The process can be daunting for novice summary writers—regardless of their ages. One tried-and-true method to help students isolate important information is the strategy journalists have traditionally used to organize their writing. Called the Journalists' Questions or the 5 Ws and an H, these simple questions help writers identify important information about a topic. Only after the questions have been answered, can writers organize their news stories—or in the case of your students—their summaries.

Steps:

1. Teach students the 5 Ws and an H questions. (See questioning frame below which provides various question forms that address each of the 5 Ws and an H.)
2. Practice applying the questions to group readings. When first using the Journalists' Questions, allow students to work in pairs or groups.
3. Make sure students understand that not all questions will be answered in an article. For example, some of the questions might be irrelevant to the topic. For example, if the study topic focuses on weather trends of the past 10 years, the Who element will probably not be particularly important.
4. Review student answers and findings.
5. See GIST, page 20, for a writing extension of this strategy.

Who?	Who are the primary or most important characters? Who are the secondary characters? Who participated? Who is affected?
What?	What is the topic of the lesson? What is its significance? What is the problem? What are the issues? What happened?
Where?	Where did the event occur? Where is the setting? Where is the source of the problem?
When?	When did the event occur? When did the problem begin? When is it most important?
Why?	Why did the event, issue, or problem occur? Why did it develop the way it did?
How?	How is the lesson, problem, or issue important? How can the problem be resolved? How does it affect the participants or characters identified in the Who question?

Sources:

"Prewriting Strategies." *KU Writing Center*. University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS. 6 June 2006
<<http://www.writing.ku.edu/students/docs/prewriting.shtml>>.

Urquhart, Vicki, and Monette McIver. *Teaching Writing in the Content Areas*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, McRel, 2005, 82-84.

Journalists' Questions Adaptation:

Educator and author Traci Gardner offers the following suggestions for using the Journalists' Questions in content area classrooms. She suggests that after a day's lesson (a reading, a lecture, a lab), an instructor asks students to consider the questions a journalist would ask when writing news stories. Students apply the questions to the lesson. Not all questions will be answered.

- Who is the lesson about?
- What was the most important event or detail?
- When did the event occur?
- Where did it happen?
- Why did it happen?
- What caused the event to occur?

Model the process prior to assigning the Journalists' Questions for independent work. Direct students to respond to each question with a one-sentence answer.

Source:

Gardner, Traci. "Traci's 16th List of Ten: Ten Reading Comprehension Activities." *Traci's Lists of Ten*. 12 June 2005. 8 June 2006 <<http://tengrrl.com/tens/016.shtml>>.

Quick Summaries

*Don't Look Back • One-Sentence Paraphrase (1 SP)
One-Word Summary • Refine and Reduce*

If you and your students are not accustomed to bringing writing into daily classroom activities, it's best to keep beginning activities simple and relatively easy for your students. The following strategies lead students to condense text, analyze information, and synthesize details. Although the strategies don't necessarily end in summaries that follow a traditional format, they do pave the way for writing that is concise yet accurately reflects an understanding of essential content.

Don't Look Back

Students—even good students—often struggle with stripping away extra information. Think about the strong student who is agonizing over a research paper. After weeks of taking copious notes, the student is overwhelmed at the prospect of paring down the information. One way to help students pick out important details, is to ask them to record only the information they remember. In other words, suggest they put away their notes and simply write down what they recall without looking back. Frequently, the most important information—especially the information that seemed most interesting to the students—is what they are able to recall and record.

Don't Look Back helps convince students that this process works and gives them the confidence to rely on their memory and their comprehension of material studied. Use this strategy frequently in class on reading assignments that include themes and concepts you want students to identify and recall.

Steps:

1. Provide students with a reading selection.
2. Ask students to take notes of important details as they read. They can make notations on the text, with sticky flags, or in their notebooks.
3. When students have finished, direct them to turn over the paper or put aside the material and write what they remember. . .without looking back.
4. After they have listed the details they recall, ask students to create a paragraph using just the information they remember.
5. Provide time for students to share and compare their paragraphs. This process of sharing helps students review content while identifying additional important information that they may have missed in their summaries.

Source:

Jones, Raymond. "Summarizing." *ReadingQuest.org: Making Sense in Social Studies*. Curry School of Education, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA. 7 Nov. 2001. 9 June 2006
<<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/readquest/strat/summarize.html>>.

One-Sentence Paraphrase (1-SP)

The One-Sentence Paraphrase (1 SP) is a quick and simple strategy that allows students to consider information presented in a reading. The strategy encourages students to focus on learning rather than on specific details. By its nature, 1 SP requires students to synthesize information and identify important learning.

Steps:

1. Model the process prior to assigning students work on individual 1 SP lessons.
2. Select a section of text that includes several paragraphs. Consider placing the sections on an overhead transparency or PowerPoint presentation so the class can work as a group on their first efforts.

Quick Summaries

One-Sentence Paraphrase (cont.)

3. Read the first paragraph with the class. Cover the paragraph. Ask students to write one sentence—and only one sentence—that reflects their understanding of the paragraph.
4. Share several sentences, looking for similarities and differences.
5. Read the next paragraph and continue the process.
6. After students feel comfortable with the process, have them work independently.

Source

Lawwill, Kenneth Stuart. "Using Writing-to-Learn Strategies: Promoting Peer Collaboration among High School Science Teachers." Diss. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA, 1999, 29-30.

One-Word Summaries

One-Word Summaries get students in the habit of picking out important concepts and main ideas. After reading a lesson, students suggest one word that most clearly summarizes the lesson's topic. Rick Wormeli says that the word choice is **not** what leads to learning in one-word summaries. Rather, student rationale for choosing certain words reinforces and even expands their learning.

Steps:

1. Following a day's lesson (or reading), ask students to write one word that best summarizes the topic.
2. After identifying the word, each student should write a brief explanation (a sentence or two) that explains the word choice.
3. Students share their word choices and explanations.
4. Encourage students to support or refute the word choices.

Source:

Wormeli, Rick. *Summarization in Any Subject: 50 Techniques to Improve Student Learning*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2005, 122-123.

Refine and Reduce

Another way to get students to extract essential information is to decrease the amount of space you allow students to use in order to convey the information. Refine and Reduce allows students to begin by condensing material into several paragraphs but requires them to pare down the information as they rewrite. As a result, students must analyze and synthesize content.

Steps:

1. After reading the material or completing a day's lesson or even a unit, ask students to write a half-page summary explaining what they've learned or what they consider to be the most important information covered in the material.
2. Give students a set amount of time to write the summary or assign it as homework.
3. Ask student to review their half-page summary. As they review, students should Refine and Reduce. Direct students to write two paragraphs. Make sure the students understand that the two paragraphs still need to contain the most important information or the heart of the material covered.
4. Again, direct students to Refine and Reduce. Suggest that they write only one paragraph.
5. Direct students to write one concise sentence that clearly conveys the material studied.
6. At any point, stop and allow students to share material. Especially at the end of the process, give students time to discuss their one sentence summaries.

Source

Jones, Raymond. "Summarizing." *ReadingQuest.org: Making Sense in Social Studies*. Curry School of Education, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA. 7 Nov. 2001. 9 June 2006
<<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/readquest/strat/summarize.html>>.

Magnet Summaries

Magnet Summaries help students expand on key terms or concepts from a reading. These “magnet” words help students organize information that becomes the basis for student-created summaries (Buehl, 2001).

Steps:

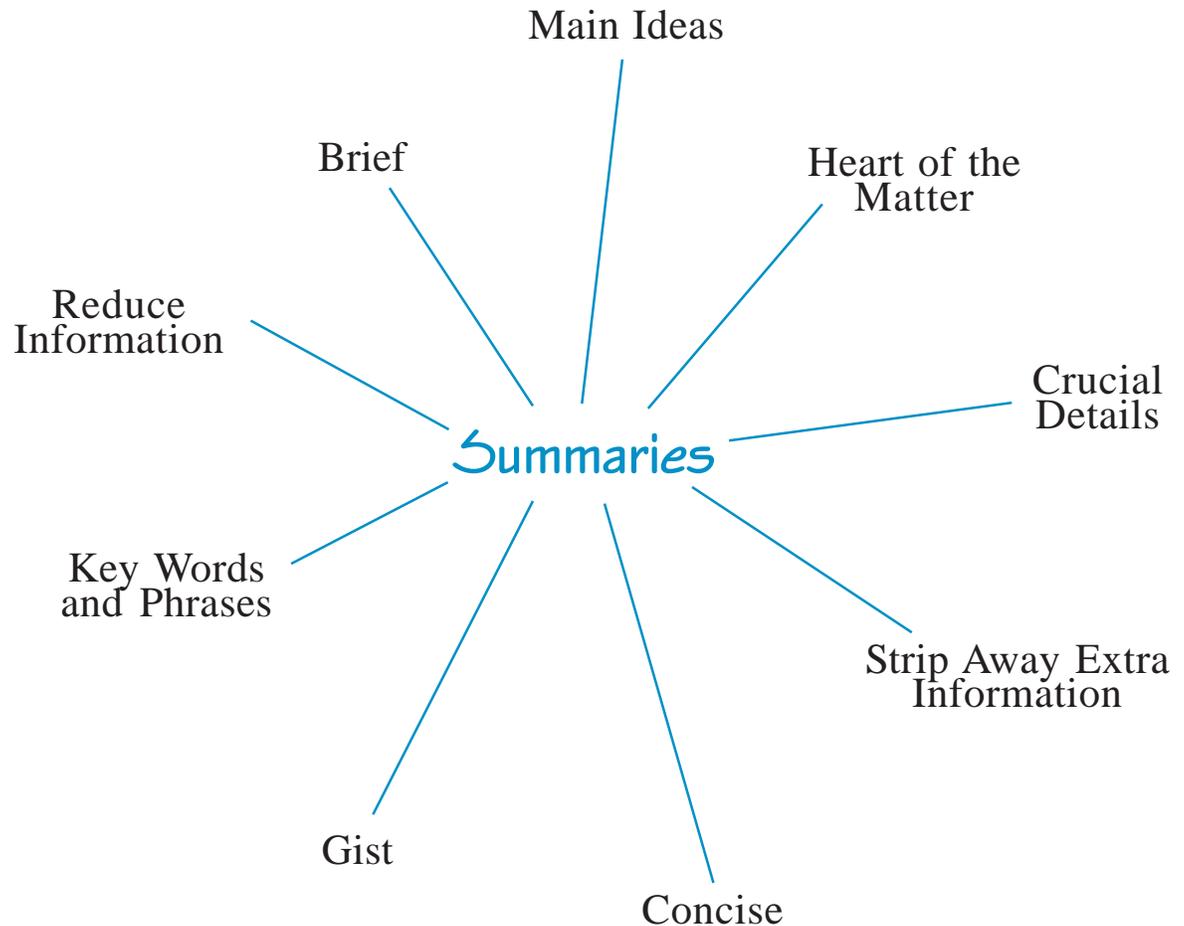
1. Introduce the concept of magnet words by connecting to students’ prior knowledge of magnets. Buehl suggests that just as magnets attract metal, magnet words attract information.
2. Instruct students to read a short piece of text.
 - As students read, they should look for key concepts that seem to organize the material.
 - After students have finished reading the material, discuss possible magnet words.
 - As a class, select one word to serve as the magnet term; write it on the chalkboard or on an overhead transparency. (When introducing the strategy, consider selecting the magnet words in advance rather than allowing students to generate the word choice.)
3. With the class, generate additional words, ideas, and details from the short reading that support the magnet word. Record the details on the chalkboard or transparency.
4. As a class or in small groups, write a paragraph using the magnet word and the details.
5. Assign the remaining text for students to read. Students can read cooperatively or independently but provide each student with several large index cards for additional magnet words and supporting details from the text. As they read the remainder of the text, they create magnet cards for selected terms.
6. Place students in cooperative learning groups. Students share cards and create summaries.
 - On the back of each magnet card write a summary statement.
 - Refine the magnet card summary statements into a summary paragraph.



Sources:

- Buehl, Doug. *Classroom Strategies for Interactive Learning*. 2nd edition. Newark, DE: IRA, 2001, 80-82.
- . "Magnet Summaries." *WiLearns*. 15 June 2006
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Magnet Summaries



Magnet Summary Example Paragraph

A strong summary reduces information from a piece of text to get at the crucial details. Good summary writers are able to strip away the extra verbiage and go straight to the heart of the matter. These writers retain the main ideas and the key words and phrases. As a result, they record the gist of an article in a brief and concise manner.

GIST Summaries

(Generating Interaction between Schemata and Text)

GIST Summaries require students to pare down information into a 20-word summary. The process helps students better comprehend content material.

Frey, Fisher, and Hernandez (2003), offer the following strategy for creating GIST Summaries.

Steps:

1. Distribute a short piece of text that is divided into four or five sections. Sections should mark logical summarizing spots. The end of each section should be identified with the word STOP.
2. Explain the GIST format—Read a portion of the text, stop, write a summarizing statement for each portion so that at the end of the reading, students should have a concise summary.
3. Introduce the text by connecting with students' prior knowledge. Identify key vocabulary words.
4. Read aloud the first passage.
5. Lead class discussion and make note of key ideas.
6. Craft a GIST statement. Students write the sentence in notebooks or journals.
7. Read aloud the remaining passages and complete the above sequence for each section.
8. Combine the GIST statements into a concise summary of the material.

Teacher Che-Mai Gray of Marysville, WA, suggests the following format for creating GIST Summaries. This format combines the Journalists' Questions with the 20-word GIST. Before asking students to create their own GIST Summaries, model the process detailed below.

Steps:

1. Select content-related newspaper articles for students to read. Allow students to work in pairs as they learn the strategy.
2. Students read the article and identify the 5 Ws and an H on the GIST template, page 23.
3. Using the 5 Ws and an H as a reference, students write 20-word summaries (GISTs).
4. Once students have mastered writing a GIST using articles, the strategy is then applied to content area texts to support comprehension and summarizing skills.

Sources

- Frey, Nancy, and Douglas Fisher, and Ted Hernandez. "What's the Gist?" Summary Writing for Struggling Adolescent Writers." *Voices from the Middle* 11.2 (2003): 43-49.
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<http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=290>.
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<<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/readquest/strat/summarize.html>>.

GIST Template

Name _____

Article Title _____

Article Source _____

1. Read the article.

2. Fill out the 5Ws and H.

Who:

What:

Where:

When:

Why:

How:

3. Write a 20-word GIST

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

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Connections to Previous *On Target* Books

On Target: Reading Strategies to Guide Learning

Story Impressions, Page 8

Story Impressions help students develop ideas about a concept prior to reading.

Jigsaw, Page 22

The Jigsaw cooperative learning activity requires students to study a section of material and create a summary which they use to “teach” the material to other students on their team.

Save the Last Word for Me, Page 23

The strategy encourages students to comment on important concepts.

On Target: Strategies to Help Struggling Readers

Main Idea Record, Pages 12-14

The Main Idea Record helps student determine the main idea of a section, make predictions, and evaluate their predictions.

Three Facts and a Fib, Page 25

The strategy allows students to identify important information while trying to fool or trick their classmates.

On Target: Strategies to Improve Test Scores

Writing to the Prompt, Pages 12-13

Writing to the Prompt helps prepare student writers for testing situations where they must respond to a prompt.

On Target: Strategies to Help Readers Make Meaning through Inferences

Inference Chart, Pages 20-21

Inference Charts help students record questions they have about reading and then follow up those questions with the conclusions they draw as they study the material.

It Says. . .I Say. . .And So, Pages 22-23

This strategy requires students to consider questions linked to the text. They find answers in the text, respond to the text, and write inferences based on the conclusions they’ve drawn.

On Target: Strategies to Build Student Vocabularies

Synecitic Comparisons, Page 21

Synecitic Comparisons to compare two different things and find similarities.

Vocabulary Notebooks/Journals, Pages 24-25

A Vocabulary Notebook provides students with a place to record important content vocabulary along with their definitions.

On Target: More Strategies to Guide Learning

Cornell Notes, Page 9

This note-taking framework requires students to write a summary based on the information they recorded.

Double Entry Journals, Pages 12-13

The journal format provides students with a place to record text quotations and to respond to the quotes.

Q Notes, Pages 14-15

With the Q Notes strategy, students develop questions, respond to their own questions, and reflect on what they’ve learned.

Websites to Explore

Blue Web'n from AT&T

<http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/bluewebn/>

Iowa Area Education Agency 267

<http://www.aea267.k12.ia.us/framework/strategies/>

Journey North's 40 Best Instructional Practices

http://www.learner.org/jnorth/tm/InstrucStrats_40Best.html

KU Writing Center, University of Kansas

<http://www.writing.ku.edu/students/guides.shtml#4>

Literacy Matters: Content Literacy

<http://www.literacymatters.org/content/readandwrite/writing.htm>

Math Teaching Resources

http://www.dmoz.org/Science/Math/Education/Teaching_Resources/

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's 6+1 Trait® Writing

<http://www.nwrel.org/assessment/department.php?d=1>

ReadingQuest.org: Making Sense in Social Studies

<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/readquest/strat/ichart.html>

SDDOE's 6+1 Writing Traits Across the Curriculum

<http://doe.sd.gov/curriculum/6plus1/acrosscurriculum.asp>

Steve Peha's Teaching That Makes Sense

<http://www.ttms.org/index.htm>

Teaching Today from Glencoe/McGraw-Hill

<http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/weeklytips.phtml/17>

Vaughn Gross Center for Reading and Language Arts

http://www.texasreading.org/utcrla/materials/secondary_content_areas.asp

Wisconsin's Literacy Education and Reading Network Source

<http://wilearns.state.wi.us/apps/default.asp>

Books for Further Reading

- Barton, Mary Lee, and Clare Heidema. *Teaching Reading in Mathematics*. 2nd ed. Aurora, CO: McRel, 2002.
- Benjamin, Amy. *Writing in the Content Areas*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education, 2005.
- Billmeyer, Rachel. *Strategies to Engage the Mind of the Learner: Building Strategic Learners*. Omaha: Dayspring, 2003.
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- Gould, Judith S. *Four Square: Writing in the Content Areas for Grades 5-9*. Carthage, IL: Teaching and Learning Company, 2004.
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- Marzano, Robert J., et al. *A Handbook for Classroom Instruction that Works*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2001.
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- Moore, David W. et al. *Developing Readers and Writers in the Content Areas*. 5th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2005.
- Ruddell, Marth Rapp. *Teaching Content Reading and Writing*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2005.

Books for Further Reading

Sorcinelli, Mary Deane, and Peter Elbow, eds. *Writing to Learn: Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines: New Directions for Teaching and Learning, No. 69*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997.

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Sigman, Cheryl M., and Sylvia M. Ford. *Writing Lessons for the Content Areas: Standards-Based Lessons That Help Students Plan, Organize, and Draft Their Nonfiction Writing in Social Studies and Science*. New York: Scholastic, 2005.

Uranu, Norman J. *Content Area Reading and Writing: Fostering Literacies in Middle and High School Cultures*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003.

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