

## Helping Students to Summarize Text and Distinguish Purpose Toolkit Report (ELA B)

- *Who is in your cohort and what are your teaching contexts?*

**Kate Peterson** – Eastern Washington University – Students at EWU are predominantly from the Spokane region, but they do come from all over the state of Washington. EWU typically has students from a wide range of preparation levels. Some students are highly motivated and well-prepared, while other students are under-prepared and struggle meeting the English standards.

**LouAnn Reamer** – Shadle Park High School – The 1390 students at Shadle Park High School are from the Northwest area of Spokane, and are primarily urban. The students who participated in this implementation of the toolkit item were seniors enrolled in English 12: Bridge to College class. This class is designed for students who did not standard on the state test or Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and, therefore, need a high level of guided practice with not only reading, but writing and communication skills as well. If students receive a B or higher in one semester of the course, they may enroll in English 101 without a placement test.

**Tim Roe** – Spokane Community College – Students at Spokane Community College come from a wide range of backgrounds. The average student age is 29.5 years old, and about half of the students are in the career and technical program, while the other half are in the transfer program. We have running start, students right out of high school, and many returning students who often have families and a job. We have many students who are former military, have owned their own business, have worked traditional jobs, or who are re-entering the workforce.

- *Briefly describe yourselves professionally.*

**Kate Peterson** – Eastern Washington University – I have been teaching at EWU since 2012. I began teaching as a graduate student while earning my MFA in poetry, and taught for the next three years as an adjunct. I have taught both composition and creative writing, and have been an advisor for EWU's undergraduate literary magazine. I currently serve as a faculty mentor for the College in the High Schools program. I work a lot with podcasts in my classroom and found our tool to be very useful in getting students to think critically about the larger purpose of a text, podcast, film, etc.

**LouAnn Reamer** – Shadle Park High School – I have been teaching high school English for 31 years with the last 26 years at Shadle Park High School. I have a B.S. in Education, my M. Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis on instructional technology, and I am a National Board Certified Teacher in English/Language Arts for Adolescents and Young Adults. I have served as an Instructional Coach for literacy, a Reading/Writing Facilitator for cross-curricular instructional practices, and a Bridge to College Leader to provide and coordinate ongoing professional learning between high school and university partners.

**Tim Roe** – Spokane Community College – I have been teaching at SCC for three years, and previously spent seven years teaching at the university level. I have previously worked on other projects involving collaboration between high schools and colleges, including the New Mexico Teacher Exchange Program, and I was a team lead for the College in the High School Program through EWU. I also am currently a Higher Ed Partner for the Bridge to College Program. I have focused a lot of energy on the development of critical reading instruction in the composition

classroom.

- ***What significant problem of practice did your intervention target?***

Students are having trouble summarizing texts. We define texts broadly to include written texts along with audio and visual texts. Students tend to focus on smaller details rather than large points which causes them to misinterpret the author's purpose. Students also tend to focus only on the first few pages when reading large works.

We chose this problem because we all have observed students struggling to understand the major concepts in the texts they are reading. Further, we agreed that students will be more likely to succeed in all of their college classes if they have clear strategies to use in order to comprehend texts when reading them. Specifically, if students can more accurately understand, and summarize, what they are reading in any college course, then it is more likely that they will succeed in each individual class because they will more correctly understand the course material. Ultimately, learning this skill in high school will help make a smoother transition to college, and reinforcing this skill set in college will help students better apply this skill set in a more independent fast-paced college environment.

- ***What CCSS relate to this problem and how (including portraits and math practices)?***

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2**

Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

**RI 11-12.4** Determine the meaning of symbols, key terms, and other domain-specific words and phrases as they are used in a specific scientific or technical context relevant to *grades*

**RI 11-12.7** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

**WPA Outcome** Read a diverse range of texts, attending especially to relationships between assertion and evidence, to patterns of organization, to the interplay between verbal and nonverbal elements, and to how these features function for different audiences and situations

- ***What scholarship (articles, books, reports) did you consult and how did it inform your project?***

Our research process made clear a few key challenges students in the United States are struggling with right now, and this directly informed our project. Specifically, we found that:

- Students have difficulty reading challenging texts. Most students will read the first few pages and make assumptions about the main point of a text then, without considering the entire text. This lead to summaries that are vague, surface level, and often inaccurate.

- Approximately half of the college students in the United States are reading at the remedial level. Therefore, critical reading strategies need to be taught at both the high school and college level.
- Students who can read effectively will be more likely to succeed in all college classes.
- The ability to write a clear and accurate summary of a text is a transferable skill that will help students better understand and work with texts in any college class.
- Ultimately, the key to writing a clear and accurate summary is critically reading and accurately understanding the text.

**Rebecca Moore Howard, Tricia Serviss, and Tanya K. Rodrigue – Writing from Sources, Writing from Sentences – Abstract** Instead of focusing on students' citation of sources, educators should attend to the more fundamental question of how well students understand their sources and whether they are able to write about them without appropriating language from the source. Of the 18 student research texts we studied, none included summary of a source, raising questions about the students' critical reading practices. Instead of summary, which is highly valued in academic writing and is promoted in composition textbooks, the students paraphrased, copied from, or patchwrote from individual sentences in their sources. Writing from individual sentences places writers in constant jeopardy of working too closely with the language of the source and thus inadvertently plagiarizing; and it also does not compel the writer to understand the source.

**Alice Horning – Reading Across the Curriculum as the Key to Student Success – Abstract** Hand-in-hand with the current renewed emphasis on student success and a resurgence of Writing Across the Curriculum, instructors in all disciplines need to refocus on Reading Across the Curriculum to address students' needs, to achieve instructional goals, and to prepare citizens for full participation in our democracy. It seems clear that a refocused emphasis on reading as the process of getting meaning from print to be used for analysis, synthesis and evaluation, in the context of critical literacy across the curriculum could potentially address the difficulties of students, the goals of teachers and the needs of the nation for an educated, informed, fully participatory democratic population. These goals can be achieved through four specific strategies that can make faster, better reading possible for everyone, including, first, an understanding of the nature of the reading process; second, a consistent focus on direct classroom teaching of critical reading skills that go beyond comprehension; third, opportunities for modeling and practice of these critical reading skills; and fourth, the development of an understanding of the conventions of disciplines and the genres used in an array of academic areas.

**Rebecca Hill – Common Core Curriculum and Complex Texts – Abstract** From primary to secondary to higher education, reading and reading comprehension remain the lynchpins of a successful American education. But they are also where most of our failures in education lie. Throughout the United States, we have leveled reading. We have computerized reading. We have delineated reading lists. We have even depredated reading to an assigned number of pages per grading period. Experts will tell us that reading is the most critical skill that a student needs to be successful in college and the workplace. And yet, of incoming college freshmen, 51% read at a remedial level. Studies have found that American students start out as good readers, but by the time they are ready to go to college they no longer possess the skills for deeper reading. And while K-12 textbooks are now written at a simpler level, periodicals, journal articles, and other reading materials have become more complex. Even the newspaper is harder to read than the typical student textbook.

**Danah Henriksen, Chris Fanhoe, Punya Mishra - Abstracting as a Trans-disciplinary**

**Habit of Mind – Abstract** We have previously described seven “tools for thinking” that are part of transdisciplinary thinking and creativity: Perceiving, Patterning, Abstracting, Embodied Thinking, Modeling, Play, and Synthesizing (Mishra, Koehler & Henriksen, 2011). The last two articles in this

series focused on the skills of Perceiving and Patterning, respectively. This article highlights the third trans-disciplinary habit of mind: Abstracting. In our conceptualization, this involves a multisensory approach, emphasizing analysis of the domain and seeking analogies across domains, to discover the core essence of some phenomena or object of study.

**John Collins – Summarize to Get the Gist – Abstract** The 10 percent summary strategy costs little in teacher time, and it prepares students for the common core state standards in literacy. As schools prepare for the common core state standards in literacy, they'll be confronted with two challenges: first, helping students comprehend complex texts, and, second, training students to write arguments supported by factual evidence. A teacher's response to these challenges might be to lead class discussions about complex reading or assign regular in-class argument essays. Yet the reality is that after discussing a difficult article with a class of 20 or more students, even the most engaging teacher cannot guarantee that every student will understand it. Meanwhile, one would be hard-pressed to find an English teacher who has not inwardly cringed at the thought of having to routinely grade stacks of in-class essays. Some teachers may even neglect to assign such essays, wanting to avoid the work that follows. I would argue that frequent written summaries of complex texts are a great way to develop students' reading comprehension and argument-writing skills, while minimizing the time the teacher spends correcting. Let's look at the benefits of this strategy as well as how the process works.

**Mary Lou Odom – Not Just for Writing Anymore: What WAC Can Teach Us About Reading to Learn – Abstract** The writing across the curriculum movement has rightfully gained recognition as a transformative force in how teachers conceive of, use, and assign writing in their classes throughout various disciplines. Drawing on data from the first three years of an ongoing study of faculty "WAC fellows" at a large, comprehensive state university, this article takes the view that, at its best, writing across the curriculum involves students deeply in writing as a social practice and that similarly applying WAC principles to student reading—and how teachers assign reading—is our best hope to address the problematic nature of how students do or do not read for school.

**Lynne A. Rhodes – When is Writing Also Reading? – Abstract** Students who demonstrate perennial difficulties with researched writing typically have poor reading skills. Those who do not improve significantly as readers and writers in first year composition, if they do not drop out, often struggle throughout college. Even when students are given explicit and enhanced instruction in reading and adjustments are made to curriculum to address demonstrated student weaknesses, a lack of synthesis skills is still evidenced in student researched writing for upper-level writing. Teachers at all levels across all content areas must realize that many students misunderstand or cannot understand the content being taught, and strategically unwrap assigned readings so that students can progress as writers and readers of complex texts. Instructors who want students to read for content should teach summary skills. Instructors who want students to read structurally and analyze conventions of genre must explicitly direct students how to analyze and interpret complex text. Post-secondary instructors must reach agreement on how to coordinate instruction in reading and writing, especially in writing intensive classrooms where students are assigned complex texts.

**Åste M. Hagen, Jason L.G. Braasch and Ivar Bråten - Relationships between spontaneous note-taking, self-reported strategies and comprehension when reading multiple texts in different task conditions – Abstract** This study investigated note-taking during multiple-text reading across two different task conditions in relation to comprehension performance and self-reports of strategy use. Forty-four undergraduates read multiple texts about climate change to write an

argument or a summary. Analysis of students' spontaneous note-taking during reading showed that intertextual elaboration strategies, as indicated by the notes, were related to deeper-level, integrated comprehension for students reading to construct an argument, whereas no such relationship was observed for students reading to summarise information. Relations between note-taking and self-reporting of strategies suggested a heightened awareness of strategy use among students reading to construct an argument, with this, possibly, explaining why their note-taking strategies accounted for variance in their comprehension performance. Discussion focuses on the unique contributions of the current work to multiple-text strategy research.

- ***What intervention did you test and how did each person in your cohort try it?***

We tested all six of our iterations included in our critical reading packet. We used them at the high school, 2 year, and 4 year level. Through this process we found that students need to be taught how to use this intervention. It is not natural for them to do; the process requires students to engage in critical thinking during times when they typically are resistant to slowing down and looking at sections individually and critically thinking about how individual sections/examples fit into the overall purpose. At this point we will each describe a little bit from our own experiences.

**Kate Peterson** – Eastern Washington University – I used the tools for my upper-level research courses (201), and fundamentals courses (100) and found it to be useful for students of many skill levels and backgrounds. When we used the tool for the podcast or a film I would start and stop the recording so that we could talk as a class about the questions on the worksheet and fill them out together. It was very helpful to use the bubble chart as well so that students could clearly see how all of the sections were connected to one main idea. Once students were familiar with the tool they could work on their own. The tool helped the students to break the podcast/film/article into more manageable sections in order to separate supporting details or plot points from the larger purpose. I found it challenging to get students to think about what questions they had as the text progressed, and so this is something we (my cohort and I) revised as we went along. It was more helpful for the students to try to think about the author's intentions throughout, and how they made their points clear to their audience.

**LouAnn Reamer** – Shadle Park High School – At the high school level, the tool needs to be introduced and navigated for the first time. The most effective way to implement the tool is to use it to build meaning of the text individually and then built as a whole class when students share responses for each section before moving to the next section. This approach parallels the use of Socratic Seminars to have a student-centered approach to critical reading and allows students to gain confidence in communicating orally after having a conceptual understanding of the text.

**Tim Roe** – Spokane Community College – I found that my students needed a lot of scaffolding early on in order to understand the intervention, but they were able to use it on their own fairly quickly after the initial scaffolding. The most successful uses of the intervention came when I began by explaining why we were using the intervention, then working through the process with a film. Essentially, we would watch the film in class, and I would pause it and we would talk through the sections together. Then, students would write on the tool itself. The next step was to have students discuss each section in small groups and then write up the sections. After a couple days of this, students were then expected to complete the tool on their own. I found this level of scaffolding to work well. Students were able to learn how to use the intervention, and then were expected to apply the intervention on their own. Toward the end of the quarter I would stop using the handout, and expect that students utilize the strategies on their own by annotating the

texts directly. Students would still receive points for these annotations, but it also helped them learn to utilize the skillset without instruction or a worksheet.

- ***How did you determine the effectiveness of your intervention?***

We utilized three types of assessment of our intervention:

**Reflection** – Students were asked to reflect on their experience using the intervention, and the common feedback we received from students was that they felt they understood the texts better. Students claimed that using the tool challenged them to think about and approach reading differently, which led to a more complete understanding of the new material. Students also were able to see the usefulness of the intervention for a wide variety of tasks.

**Informal Assessment** – This largely occurred through classroom discussion. We all found that students were better prepared for classroom discussion. Students clearly understood the text better and were thinking more about the text. We believe that students understood the texts better partly because of the particular tool we were using, but also because they were being asked to slow down and read strategically from the beginning. We also found that students were more willing to bypass discussing whether they liked the text or not, which allowed us to jump right in with discussing the rhetorical aspects of the texts. In other words, the intervention seemed to change the way students interacted with the texts and how they actually looked at the texts.

**Formal Assessment** – Students submitted the intervention tool, including their written summaries of the text, and students also wrote formal essays about the texts. We found that the quality of student's summaries increased significantly when they were required to use the intervention. The summaries became more accurate, and students were better able to draw on themes that occurred throughout the text, rather than fixating on the beginning or end. Further, students essays improved because they understood the text at a deeper level. This led to less surface level essays which meant that more critical thinking was evident in student's work.

- ***How did students respond?***

**Kate Peterson** – Eastern Washington University – At first my students did not seem to enjoy the experience, (the worksheet is long and seems daunting) though once they understood that this was going to be a tool we were using again and again, they warmed up to it and could see the benefits. My students found it easier to understand the texts and write successful summaries as the worksheet helped them break the text into more manageable sections. They also had a better understanding of the author's intentions and purpose and did not get distracted by plot points or supporting details. All of this was useful because students began to realize that by using the tool they did not have to read the text over and over in order to understand the larger meaning/purpose.

**LouAnn Reamer** – Shadle Park High School – “I paid so much more attention to the details” was the predominant response to the tool. Students added that they had never watched a film so closely, but as a result they were able to trace the main ideas so that summary writing after was indeed easier. They had “left tracks in the snow” to return to with the tool. Students also applied these main ideas to the summative writing assessment of the unit, an argumentative essay, expanding on the main ideas to develop a claim with textual support.

**Tim Roe** – Spokane Community College – My students appreciated the experience, even though they did not necessarily enjoy it. This process requires critical thinking and engagement with the text, and that is hard work. I consistently heard comments like “I understand the text so much better now.” A quote about a film we watched in class from one student captures a common sentiment well; he said “I have seen this movie several times before, but now I understand it in a much deeper way than I previously had”. Overall, I have found that students have a hard time doing this intellectual work, but they always seem to learn from it and most students acknowledge that it helps them understand texts more deeply and accurately. In fact, I haven’t heard any students complain about the work in terms of it being not worth or effort. Finally, students seem to be understanding that this is a lifelong skill that they are developing.

- *In what ways has your work changed your thinking about students’ transitions or your teaching?*

This project helped us understand the ways all teachers contribute to student’s college success. Specifically, we are better able to understand the real challenges and demands placed on students at the different levels, and we are able to see how their educational experiences continue to scaffold on each other. Perhaps most importantly, this project has demonstrated the importance of communicating with colleagues at our various regional institutions. In this way we are able to better understand our students, and what we can do to help them succeed as they move forward with their educational careers. The big question: How do we continue creating opportunities to talk to each other and build connections together?