

GIST

Submitted by NWREL Staff

Traits: Comprehension

Grade Level: Middle School (6-8), High School (9-12)

Time: Varies

Supplies:

- Select a text to practice summarizing.
Make copies of the pdf file [GIST handout](#)

Objectives:

- Students distinguish between significant and supporting details. Students summarize and paraphrase with purpose.

Lesson Description:

This activity asks students to squeeze meaning into a tight, precise summary. The goal of GIST is to have students convey the “gist” of what they read by summarizing the text in 20 words or less (Moore, Moore, Cunningham, & Cunningham, 1994, page 125). Students work to revise their summaries until they meet the 20-word goal. The activity forces students to discard extraneous details and focus their reading on what is really important. Discuss the criteria for a good summary with the class. Here is one set of sample criteria for summarizing:

Include only essential information—delete trivial and repetitious information. Collapse lists into broader categories. If the passage lists the achievements of Robert Fulton, Alexander Graham Bell, and Thomas Edison, collapse the names into the category of “inventors.”

Use existing topic sentences of each paragraph or create a topic sentence that describes each paragraph. Focus on conveying the information through key words and phrases. Don’t be afraid to revise your summary.

What to Do:

- 1) Ask the students to read a short section of no more than three paragraphs.
- 2) Ask the class to remember important ideas from the passage and list them on the board.
- 3) Work with the class to condense those ideas into 20 words.
- 4) Ask students to read a second short section. Create a 20-word summary that incorporates information from both the first and second sections.

5) If you feel ambitious, have the students repeat the strategy with a third section.

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