Inquiry on effective summarization strategies for adolescent/secondary students

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**Introduction : Why summary writing?**

Summarization is not just repeating what has been read. It requires the reader’s complex cognitive strategies and organizing skills. Therefore, summary writing assignment may not be easy for some students who don’t have appropriate comprehension ability and strategies. Many students feel pressure when they have to summarize a page of a history book so they prefer just copy a page in a dictionary. (Wormeli, 2005) Summarization may be viewed as a beginning step of higher level of writing because it doesn’t require us to create something. It sounds easy that all we have to do is rewrite based on a given text. But many students feel it complicated. Research indicates that main reason may be they don’t know where thesis statement is and they are not taught how to locate thesis statement. “Teaching summary writing has been overlooked compared to other writing instruction”. (Frey, Fisher & Hernandez, 2003) What is summarization? Summarization can be defined in various ways:

1) It is to give a brief statement of the main points of something. (Oxford dictionary)

2) It is restating the essence of text or an experience in as few words as possible or in a new, yet efficient manner. (Wormeli, 2005)

3) It is a complex task in which students are required to use their prior knowledge to perform cognitive processes on the information that is read. ... include evaluating to distinguish key ideas from supporting or unimportant ideas, constructing logical connections between those key and supporting ideas, and condensing the ideas or information to present the gist in students’ own words. (Jitendra & Garjria, 2011)
4) It is a synthetic strategy that requires readers to determine the degree of importance of the information included in the text. (Hayes, 1989)

Summarization can work as a bridge between reading and writing. “Reading and writing have traditionally been treated as separate processes, but some research on the relationship suggests that the two processes should be taught together. Good summarizing requires thorough understanding of the text, mastery of reading strategies, ability to remove unnecessary details, the skill to draw conclusions from the outset of reading, and focus on the main idea”. (Havola, 1987) If students are instructed on how to summarize effectively, then they could not only improve their writing skills but also learn important reading ability. Summary writing itself is not an end purpose. Various cognitive strategies and activities occurring during the process of summarization have meaningful benefits especially for adolescent/secondary students. One of the most required academic performances in college is summary writing to report or inform knowledge. Summary writing comes before analyzing, discussing or solving problems. “The ability to write accurately and efficiently for the purpose of reporting information is a gateway skill for other types of writing, particularly research reports and persuasive essays”. (Frey, Fisher & Hernandez, 2003)

Elements of Effective Summary Writing: A Look on Rubric

To find out what kind of elements should be considered to be effective summarization, it is necessary to consult the rubric for assessing summary writing. (Table 1) It shows four major traits except conventions: length, accuracy, paraphrase,
and focus. Other rubrics have the similar traits with this.

Table 1. Rubric for Assessing Summary Writing (Frey, Fisher & Hernandez, 2003)

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length</strong></td>
<td>6-8 sentences</td>
<td>9 sentences</td>
<td>10 sentences</td>
<td>11+ sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accuracy</strong></td>
<td>All statements accurate and verified by story</td>
<td>Most statements accurate and verified by story</td>
<td>Some statements cite outside information or opinions</td>
<td>Most statements cite outside information or opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paraphrase</strong></td>
<td>No more than 4 words in a row taken directly from story</td>
<td>One sentence contains more than 4 words in a row taken directly from story</td>
<td>Two sentences contain more than 4 words in a row taken directly from story</td>
<td>3+ sentences contain more than 4 words in a row taken directly from story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td>Summary consists of main idea and important details only</td>
<td>Summary contains main idea and some minor details</td>
<td>Summary contains main idea and only minor details</td>
<td>Main idea of story is not discussed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventions</strong></td>
<td>No more than one punctuation, grammar, or spelling error</td>
<td>2-3 punctuation, grammar, or spelling errors</td>
<td>4-5 punctuation, grammar, or spelling errors</td>
<td>6+ punctuation, grammar, or spelling errors</td>
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</table>

**Overall Grade:**

**Comment:**

According to the rubric, summarization should be condensed or abridged to certain amount of sentences and should not be outside information of a given text. It would be more preferable to paraphrase than directly borrow words. Summarizers need to distinguish which is main idea, major/minor details. In short, good summary writing should have main idea and major details from a given text in a paraphrased or rewritten form.

Students often wonder and ask teachers how long a summary should be and what should be included in it. (Peretz, 1986) Taylor(1984)’s suggestion that a summary should be about “one-third the length of the original” may be widely-accepted one for the proper length of summary. Students should be taught that summary writing is related to conciseness and abstraction. If the original text should be abridged to
smaller portion of writing, less important details need to be dropped to include central ideas and major supporting details. Accuracy, Paraphrase, and Focus may be related to each other. Summary writing should be from the original text to have accuracy, but not directly copy the idea from the text to fulfill the requirement of Paraphrase, and should be major idea not minor to meet the criterion of Focus. Adolescent/secondary students are expected to have academic writing skills. If they practice summary writing by considering these elements, they can acquire ability of comprehending and analyzing texts naturally.

**What Research Says about It: Benefits and Strategies of Summarization**

It is natural that summarizing should be closely related to reading ability. “Writing and reading skills tend to be intertwined in practice.” (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000) Without understanding of the text through proper reading strategies, we cannot expect good summarizing. Studies suggest that summary writing and reading instruction should go hand in hand. “Poor summarizers spend little time reading, do not draw conclusions, do not plan their writing during reading, and have difficulty finding the main idea.” (Havola, 1987) According to Radmacher and Latosi-Sawin (1995) research, it finds that participating [in summary writing exercises] student scores on the final examination were eight percent higher than nonparticipating students. Students who received summary writing instruction could identify main ideas better. Culler(2010)conducted the research on the relationship between improvements in passage retell fluency and summarization skills. The research said that participants increased their scores on a post-test summarization measure indicating that there is a possible functional
relationship between the students’ passage retell fluency strategy use and higher-level summarization skills. Many research data show that summary writing strategies can improve reading comprehension as well as quality writing of summary.

Here are five benefits of summary writing strategies collected through results of other researches:

1) It facilitates reading comprehension. (Jeong, 2009, Peretz, 1986)
2) Summary writing activities can be used as a learning tool. (Tsai, 1995)
3) It works as a good way of cooperative learning. (Jeong, 2009, Wichadee, 2010)
4) It has positive effect on test-preparation and its result for adolescent/secondary students due to developmental nature in summary writing. (Radmacher & Latosi-Sawin, 1995, Lia, 1993)
5) It prepares students to demonstrate good understanding of a text, which will be useful in practical situations. (Peretz, 1986)

It may be helpful to look inside more of these.

1) It facilitates reading comprehension.

Summarization is closely related to comprehension skills because it requires the ability to extract or construct the gist of text, and summary writing has been considered a technique for enhancing comprehension and retention of written text. (Hidi & Anderson, 1986) Summary writing cannot be done with reading the source text just once, especially when the purpose of summary is to explain with accuracy. That is, it is necessary for students to cover several readings to completely understand the text.
2) **Summary writing activities can be used as a learning tool.**

Summary writing is considered to be one of the powerful generative learning strategies. (Tsai, 1995) When designing summary writing activities, many variables that promote meaningful learning can be included: learning vocabularies and expressions in meaningful context, activating learner’s prior knowledge, fostering content knowledge, and differentiating type of summary writing according to the type of text.

3) **It works as a good way of cooperative learning.**

Collaborative summarization activity with peers can improve students’ summarizing ability. According to the research (Jeong, 2009), the collaborative summarization group’s performance was significantly improved on identification of main ideas and writing quality in comparison to the control group. Another research studied and compared Bangkok University students’ English(L2) summary writing ability before and after they were taught in a collaborative setting of summarization work. (Wichadee, 2010) The results revealed that after the students were taught in a cooperative way (the participant of the research worked through editing and revising together until they got a final paper), their summary writing score of the post-test was higher than that of the pretest and they had positive attitudes toward this learning.

4) **It has positive effect on test-preparation and its result for**
adolescent/secondary students due to developmental nature in summary writing.

Research studies comparing college and older high school students indicate that high school and college students outperform younger students in their propensity to plan ahead and, in their sensitivity to find the main idea in the text. (Lia, 1993) With strategic summarization instruction, students can get higher score on their examination as research suggests. (Radmacher and Latosi-Sawin, 1995)

5) It prepares students to demonstrate good understanding of a text, which will be useful in practical situations.

Adolescent/secondary students’ academic performance is closely related to the job demands of their future profession. Summarizing ability is the basic and essential skill to be required for professional life. Therefore, once they are equipped with effective summarizing strategies, they will benefit from those for their satisfactory results.

Summarization Strategies: Gist, Rule-based, and GRASP

Braxton (2009) study shows that two summarization strategies – GIST and Rule-based – can improve the expository reading comprehension and summary writing. Interesting point is that there is a significant gender difference; GIST group males outperformed the females, while Rule-based group females outperformed males. The research indicated that the both strategies have significant effect on improving
summarizing ability and promote reading comprehension.

Table 2. Two summarization strategies (Braxton, 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GIST (Generating Interactions between Schemata and Text)</th>
<th>Rule-based</th>
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<tr>
<td>STEPS</td>
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<td>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.</td>
<td>The strategy focuses on the concept of requiring students to follow a set of rules or steps that leads them to produce an organized summary. Before assigning the students to work on the strategy independently, take the time to make the strategy “come alive” for the students. Demonstrate the steps with a model passage.</td>
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<td>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.</td>
<td>1. Select a content-related passage. Read with students or assign to students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td>2. Require students to go through the passage and delete trivial or unnecessary material.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Introduce the text by connecting with students’ prior knowledge. Identify key vocabulary words.</td>
<td>3. Tell students to delete redundant material.</td>
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<td>4. Read aloud the first passage.</td>
<td>4. Remind students to substitute subordinate terms for lists (for example, substitute flowers for daisies, tulips, and roses).</td>
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<td>5. Lead class discussion and make note of key ideas.</td>
<td>5. Ask students to select or create a topic sentence.</td>
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<td>6. Craft a GIST statement. Students write the sentence in notebooks or journals.</td>
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<td>7. Read aloud the remaining passages and complete the above sequence for each section.</td>
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<td>8. Combine the GIST statements into a concise summary of the material.</td>
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Secondary students would need to be prepared to read more complex text when they become college students and perform many presentations in professional areas after graduating from a college. More often than not, reporting skills which often requires in writing form is most often needed ability, which means identifying, emphasizing, and summarizing main point in a concise and clear manner. (Peretz, 1986)
Another summarizing strategy is GRASP. (Hayes, 1989) The basic steps needed to implement the procedure are: (1) preparing the students for the lesson; (2) reading for information; (3) organizing remembered information; and (4) writing the summary. While it gives an idea of general procedure for summary writing, it sounds too broad to implement for ESL students.

These three summarization strategies might be combined according to target students, students' and texts' levels. For beginner students it will be helpful to start more specific approach like Rule-based than general one. As the students develop their skills and get used to the strategies, it is important to encourage them to move forward and experiment with other strategies so that they can benefit from different aspect of skills.

The three strategies mentioned above are general way of summarizing. There are supportive strategies to promote effective summary writing: notetaking, mapping and margin-marking. (Lia, 1993) Teachers can encourage students to use these tips for effective summary writing.

**What I have done in my classroom and its potentials**

I implemented reading and summarizing instruction on 11th and 12th ESL students for two semesters last year 2011 and this year 2012. Reading comprehension is most assessed area for secondary students in Korea when it comes to English language test. But soon the reformed test which will test the four skills is going to begin in a few years. Therefore, I thought that summarization would be the best way to check out their understanding of a text as well as strengthen their comprehension
further. Here’s what I have done:

**Participants and summary writing format used**

Figure 1. Summary Writing Format (Designed for Classroom Use) Students were instructed to write summary under small portion of each paragraph.

There were about 15 to 20 students participating in 90-minute summary writing activity after school once or twice a week except mid-term and final test period. First, I chose articles from New York Times and Harvard Business Review in which main ideas are well-expressed and paragraphs are well-divided so that students may start summarizing comfortably. The articles were columns, editorials, and many research
ideas or results related to psychology or many other inspirational topics, such as “Nine Things Successful People Do Differently”, “Sorry, Strivers; Talent Matters”, “Willpower – It’s in Your Head” and so on. The order of articles covered in the class was in logical flow to make students have reading experience in an organized way. While they were summarizing the articles, they were more likely to concentrate on the reading. The students were provided with organized format as in Figure 1. for summary writing. They wrote summary writing in the space under each short paragraph in one or two sentences. Another format is to let students write key words of each paragraph first and then have them summarize using key words. At first, they wrote summaries in Korean (L1), and after some practices, some advanced students could summarize in English (L2). As an article noted (Williams, 2011), the students that experienced difficulties constructing summaries of the entire article without summarizing individual paragraphs first, found it difficult to identify the main idea of the entire article. For those who haven’t summarized a text very often, it is important to start the task by splitting into small units of paragraphs. Then it will be much easier to see the main idea of the whole text.

**Hard to paraphrase**

Paraphrasing is essential part of summary writing. But my students couldn’t paraphrase much. Studies indicate that L2 learners’ summary writings contain much less paraphrasing than those of L1 writers. (Keck, 2006) According to his classification of four major Paraphrase Types: Near Copy, Minimal Revision, Moderate Revision, and Substantial Revision, it was found that L2 writers used significantly more Near Copies than L1 writers. I found that my students wrote their
summaries in Near Copy type. So I had to teach them what paraphrase is but it was really difficult to let them paraphrase a given text, for they are not used to writing in English in the first place. Naturally I turned to Rule-based summarizing strategy in which one deletes unnecessary/redundant material and selects/invents a topic sentence. (Perin, 2007) This simple-looking strategy worked really well with my students. Their summary writing improved and sounded comprehensible with main points and important supporting details. To facilitate their summary writing, students were allowed to summarize under small portion of paragraph and later be checked their understanding of how well they summarized. This activity could be extended as a collaborative learning by comparing their summary writings with peers and discussing content. In light of writing as collaborative aspect, summary writing activity can also be done as a group work, since every writing work has audiences.

**Audiences of summary writing**

Summaries can be of two kinds, reader-based and text-based (writer-based). (Hidi & Anderson, 1986) In classroom situations, reader would be teachers or peers, but in the real world, students face different audiences. (Peretz, 1986) Summarization method can be different according to the target audience. For example, if audience is mostly teachers in a classroom setting, students would need to include supporting details in their summary writings to demonstrate their understanding of a text and knowledge. But real world audiences prefer generalization under possibly distracting circumstances, when summary has to be conveyed in oral form. Therefore, teachers need to remind students that their summary writing should be done differently under different purpose, that is,
different audiences.

**Source Text: Another variable on effective summarization**

According to the journal article (Yu, 2009), source text had significant and relatively larger effects than the summarizers’ language abilities on summarization performance. Participants in the test were asked to write summaries of one of three extended English texts of similar length and readability, but different level of words and organization. The more familiar the students were with the text, the better they performed on the summarization task. It may imply that teachers need to consider organization and level of the text to promote summarizability for the beginning step of summary task when selecting source text.

**A conclusion**

“Answering questions and answers regarding a text would only promote recall. In contrast, summarizing would provide students with opportunities for comprehending, evaluating, condensing, and transforming ideas”. (Hidi & Anderson, 1986) Adolescent/secondary students would need to use summarizing skills very often in real situations which may be directly related to academic performances for some or jobs for others. Clearly it would be beneficial that if one has capability to summarize any subjects in a concise and accurate manner. Summarizing is viewed as active learning rather than passive one according to many researches, since it entails recalling, organizing, reordering, elaborating and activating one’s prior knowledge.

Summary writing gives students a lot of benefits in terms of language learning in
general as well as important writing skills for specific purpose. It provides with meaningful vocabulary learning through opportunities of reading various context. Students can benefit from the activity of summary writing in a wide variety of aspects. Teacher role is thus crucial in instructing and guiding students to have them fully experience effective summarization strategies and thereby they can write different types of summaries so that “they will be prepared for the real world”. (Peretz, 1986)

When reading a text, more or less readers would use their own strategies to understand the text on the whole. But with the effective strategies in mind, students will be able to present their summaries in more elaborated way. To make that happen, teachers should provide students with sufficient model writing and the use of strategies in the process. The effect of learning summary writing can be expanded with collaborative work in which students compare and discuss their work in pairs or small group. Summarization activity is not a linear task but multidimensional one depending on the use of strategies with various source texts in different setting.
Inquiry on Summary Writing

Jihyeon Kim

Appendix A

HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW
Nine Things Successful People Do Differently
By Heidi Grant Halvorson | February 15, 2015

Why have you ever�on a summary of your work, or a book on your work, or a poem? You are really doing this because you want to understand an idea or a strategy or a story. The only way to do it is by writing down what you know. The problem is that this summary may be your own interpretation, which means it is not always the same as the original work. In this case, you may need to read it again, and then write it down again. This time, you may need to add more details or interpret it differently. In this way, you will get a deeper understanding of the original work.

1. Get specific.
When you are not sure what you mean, you need to be more specific. “Nine Things Successful People Do Differently” by Heidi Grant Halvorson is an excellent example of this. She has written a book about how successful people work, and she has also written a summary of her book. In her summary, she talks about how successful people are different from others, and she gives some tips on how to become more successful. She also mentions some of the common traits that successful people share.

2. Have grit.
It is important to remember that success is not just about having a good idea, but also about having the determination to work hard and stick with it. Successful people are not afraid to try new things, even if they don’t work out, and they are willing to put in the effort to make things happen. They are not discouraged by setbacks, and they keep going even when things don’t go as planned.

3. Own your weaknesses.
It is important to acknowledge that we all have weaknesses, and we need to work on them. Successful people are not afraid to admit their weaknesses, and they use them as opportunities to grow and learn. They are not afraid to ask for help, and they are open to feedback and criticism. They are not afraid to take risks, and they are willing to try new things.

4. Be a realistic optimist.
When you are setting goals, it is important to be realistic about the time you have, the resources you have, and the complexity of the task. Successful people are not unrealistic about what they can accomplish, and they set goals that are challenging but achievable. They are not afraid to fail, and they use failure as an opportunity to learn and grow.

5. Know exactly how far you have to go.
Achieving your goals also requires honest and regular feedback from others. This is another area where successful people excel. They know exactly what they need to do to reach their goals, and they are willing to put in the effort to make it happen. They are not afraid to ask for help, and they are open to feedback and criticism. They are not afraid to take risks, and they are willing to try new things.

6. Summing up.
In conclusion, successful people are different from others. They have a unique combination of traits that allow them to succeed. They are not afraid to try new things, even if they don’t work out, and they are willing to put in the effort to make things happen. They are not discouraged by setbacks, and they keep going even when things don’t go as planned.
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