

Agriculture

Summarising

Content and alignment

Summarising is regularly cited as one of the best ways to make sense of written information, and to retain and recall the information. Learning to summarise, and practising the strategy, improves learners' ability to learn from reading.

Intent

The intent of this resource is to provide tutors with a quick and effective approach to develop learners' summarising skills.

What is summarising?

Summarising is a very natural and common practice. For example, we often tell friends about a movie or event by stating the key points while ignoring the superfluous information. Summarising written text is essentially the same thing. The main points are extracted and presented in one's own words. Summarising is not an easy strategy, however, and the more learners practise it, the better they will be able to retain and recall what they read. The sequence described below will help learners practise this strategy.

Sequence

There are three parts to this sequence. Learners will:

1. use topic sentences to form summaries
2. verbally summarise the content to a peer
3. evaluate and improve summaries.

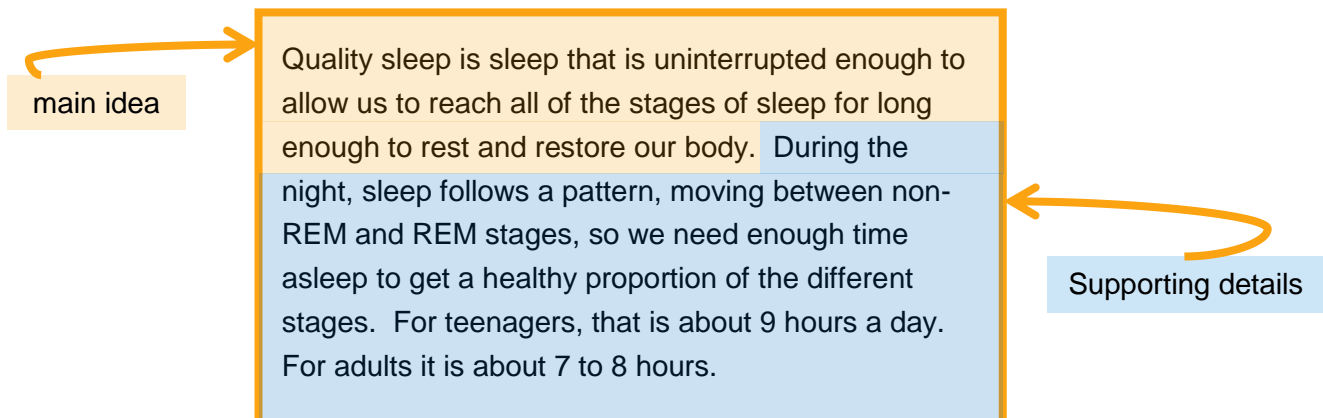
1. Use topic sentences to form summaries

Many learners will be unaware that most paragraphs contain a main idea, which is presented in the topic sentence. These sentences can be combined to form a useful summary.

Step one: Select a paragraph from a course workbook and ensure all learners have the paragraph in front of them or project it on the whiteboard.

Ask learners to read the paragraph and discuss with others what the main idea of the paragraph is.

For example, this paragraph taken from a workbook on 'sleep' has a main idea and some supporting details:



Step two: Show learners through examples that many paragraphs can be divided between the topic sentence, which contains the main idea, and the remainder, which usually holds supporting details.

Note: In some cases, the main idea is either in the second sentence or dispersed among the other sentences. It is beneficial to develop learners' critical skills by asking them to identify the topic sentence, keeping in mind that it need not necessarily be the first sentence.

2. *Verbally summarise the content to a peer*

Step one: Hand a text to the class. This can be any text from your course material. Ask the learners to take several minutes to read the topic sentence of each paragraph.

Step two: Have learners work in pairs and take turns to verbally summarise the contents of the topic sentences into one concise sentence. Together the learners fine-tune their summary.

3. *Evaluate and improve summaries*

This part of the process is optional, but helps learners improve their summarising skills and helps generate interest in reading the remainder of the text.

Step one: Ask each pair to read out their summary. Write the summaries on the board.

Step two: Engage the learners in a whole-class discussion using the following questions:

- Which summary has the most important information?
- Which is the most concise?

Step three: As a whole class underline the best information, phrases or words within each of the summaries on the board.

Step four: As a whole class write a new summary, using the best parts of the others.

Note: If the summary becomes too long, have a discussion about which parts are of the least importance. Remove these from the summary.

Summary

If this activity is used regularly, learners quickly realise that summarising information is a quick and effective method of processing, and remembering, the information in a text.

Summaries should be short, contain only the most important information, and can be verbal or written. With the right modelling summarising can become an art learners will continue to practise in all fields of study.