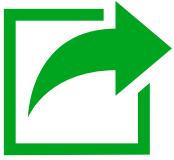




COMMUNICATION

Summarizing and
synthesizing

Summarizing and synthesizing



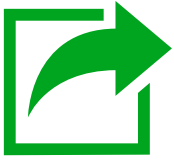
Strategies to share with students

Suggested ideas and practices educators can share with students to support awareness of the topic and development of the skill. Strategies can be adopted/adapted as needed.

- Summarize immediately.** After completing an assigned reading or attending a class meeting, immediately write down a summary (do not proofread for grammatical correctness) of everything that you remember without looking at your notes or referring to the reading. After you have written down everything you remember, refer to your notes to fill in any gaps. Then, reflect on whether everything you wrote down was truly important; omit anything extraneous or redundant. Completing these summaries regularly can help you form useful study aids for future exams and assignments.
- Quick writes.** To reinforce your understanding of a reading or topic, complete a 2 minute “quick write” (or free write) of everything you remember. Then, review the course material to add additional details as necessary. Completing these quick writes regularly can help you form useful study aids for future exams and assignments



Summarizing and synthesizing



Strategies to share with students

Suggested ideas and practices educators can share with students to support awareness of the topic and development of the skill. Strategies can be adopted/adapted as needed.

- Summarize, question, clarify, and predict.** As you complete a reading, engage in the following steps:
 - Summarize: Every 1-2 pages, write down 1-2 sentences of summary about the most important information you have read.
 - Question: As you read, write down a list of questions about topics or content that you need more help to understand.
 - Clarify: When terms or concepts are unclear, stop reading and reference other materials (dictionary, other course readings, reference guide). Then, write 1-2 sentences of clarification that help you understand the challenging term or concept.
 - Predict: Every 4-5 pages, write down a sentence predicting what the conclusions, next steps, or future applications could be. Afterwards, reference your prediction sentence and note if you were correct or incorrect.

- Share your summaries.** After completing a reading or attending class, regularly schedule a study session with your peers to review and compare your notes and summaries. Ideally, this is scheduled at the same time every week—perhaps immediately after class. Work together to take the best information from each person’s summary so that everyone has a complete and accurate set of notes.



Summarizing and synthesizing



Tips for course design and delivery

Ways educators can bring awareness of the topic and incorporate development of the skill into post-secondary course design and delivery.

- Model how to summarize and synthesize information.** Using a short or abbreviated course text, lead a class activity in which you show students how to find the main idea of a text. Then, show students how to condense the key information into a brief set of notes. Alternately, help students locate the key information in oral presentations by similarly helping students find the main point of a talk and condensing key information. Some strategies to scaffold this activity include:
 - “Chunking” the reading into smaller sections and asking students to identify and summarize the key information of each “chunk”.
 - Using graphic organizers and visual schema to help students better visualize the information.

- Provide guided reading and self-reflection questions.** To help students locate the main idea of a text, regularly provide students with discussion and/or reading comprehension questions. These questions can help students locate the key information of a text and prepare summary notes. Additional self-reflection questions can also help students reflect on and consolidate information into written notes. These questions could ask:
 - What was the main idea?
 - What information was crucial in supporting this main idea?
 - What information was unnecessary or irrelevant?
 - What key words, concepts, or phrases were the most important?



Summarizing and synthesizing



Tips for course design and delivery

Ways educators can bring awareness of the topic and incorporate development of the skill into post-secondary course design and delivery.

- Encourage taking notes by hand.** Students increasingly take notes with their laptops instead of using pen and paper. The disadvantage of typed notes is that many students can type quickly enough to effectively take notes verbatim; this requires minimal summary skill compared with hand-written notes, which require students to summarize information as they hear it. Cite research demonstrating that taking notes by hand leads to better retention and comprehension.
- Assign summary activities throughout the course.** Require written and/or oral summaries at regular intervals throughout the class as part of one or more assignments. This encourages students to reflect on key information and consolidate ideas even when summaries are not required.
- Discuss different types of synthesis.** Like many things, synthesis exists on a spectrum and there is not one way to perform it. Share with students that there are different types of synthesis and that some types involve more in-depth critical thinking than others. Below are some examples of synthesis:
 - Incorporate multiple references for a point or idea that has been summarized to ensure the point or idea has been synthesized from multiple sources.
 - Extrapolating information from one context and applying it to another.
 - Generating new hypotheses for your research based on previous findings.
 - Drawing unique conclusions based on cited information.
 - Addressing gaps and or implications of the cited information.
 - Look for similarities and differences between your sources.



Summarizing and synthesizing



Activities to do with students

Downloadable activities with suggested guidelines that educators can do with students. Activities can be adopted/adapted as needed.

Activity: One Sentence Summary

Overview

After a class meeting or assigned reading, ask students to reflect on the “one sentence summary” of what they just read and/or heard. The one sentence summary should be the most important piece of information that they learned from the class and/or reading. Students can share their ideas in various ways to allow their peers to make connections with big ideas.

Review the [Educator Activity Guide](#) before getting started with this activity.

Time

- Under 20 minutes
- 20 minutes to 1 hour
- More than 1 hour
- Over several classes

Format

- Individual
- In pairs
- Small groups
- Large groups
- Whole class

Modality

- In person
- Online synchronous
- Online asynchronous

Resources

- Module notes
- Paper
- Pen/pencil
- Laptop/tablet



Summarizing and synthesizing

Instructions

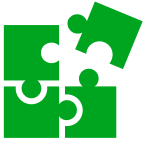
1. Explain to students that working to capture the essential information from a text or talk will set the path for developing clear thoughts and opinions related to the content. Identifying key words also gives students a starting point for their inquiry.
2. After a class session or assigned reading, ask students to reflect on the “one sentence summary” of what they just read and/or heard. The one sentence summary should be the most important piece of information that they learned from the class and/or reading. This can be written down anonymously on a cue card and left for the instructor or submitted via an anonymous online form submission. Ensuring the instructor has these statements allows him/her to shape lessons/lectures with a knowledge of where students are with understanding.
3. Share the statements with the class once you have received them. Use them as ways to enrich thinking and discussion as opportunities arise.

Variation(s)

- An extension to this activity is to ask students to also reflect on the “muddiest point”, which is the point of information they found most confusing during the class and/or reading.



Summarizing and synthesizing



Activities to do with students

Downloadable activities with suggested guidelines that educators can do with students. Activities can be adopted/adapted as needed.

Activity: They Say, I Say

Overview

To help students better summarize information and then respond to it, ask them to use the *They Say/I Say framework*. This framework suggests a series of templates that help students incorporate citations, make comparisons, oppose ideas and arguments, add meta-commentary, and make concessions. In this way, students gain several entryways into a text.

Review the [Educator Activity Guide](#) before getting started with this activity.

Time

- Under 20 minutes
- 20 minutes to 1 hour
- More than 1 hour
- Over several classes

Format

- Individual
- In pairs
- Small groups
- Large groups
- Whole class

Modality

- In person
- Online synchronous
- Online asynchronous

Resources

- Module notes
- Paper
- Pen/pencil
- Laptop/tablet
- They say, I say* prompts



Summarizing and synthesizing

Instructions

1. Remind students that summarizing and citing information is crucial in most applied research contexts, particularly in research essays.
2. To help students learn how to summarize information and then respond to it, ask students to use Graff & Birkenstein's They Say/I Say framework (2010). Here, the writer (i.e., the student) puts into context what others have already written. This framework suggests a series of templates that help students incorporate citations, make comparisons, oppose ideas and arguments, add meta-commentary, and make concessions. Students should use this tool after reading, watching a video, or listening to a lecture. See below for some examples of they say, I say prompts you can share with students.
 - Incorporate Citations:
 - X suggests that "_____".
 - X proposes that "_____".
 - In X's opinion, "_____".
 - Make Comparisons:
 - In the same way, ...
 - In contrast, ...
 - Just like X, Y also...
 - Oppose Ideas and Arguments:
 - A weakness overlooked in X's point is that...
 - One calls into question X's example of... because....
 - I disagree with X's suggestion that.... because....
 - Add Meta-Commentary:
 - In other words, ...
 - That is to say, ...
 - When viewed from this perspective,
 - Make Concessions:
 - While X presents a viable option for some people, it cannot be a solution for all.
 - To be sure, there is value in X's claim, but it is not a value that can be transferred to...
 - Naturally, this proposal offers many benefits...but....



Summarizing and synthesizing

Instructions

3. Have students watch a short video or read a short text related to your course content.
4. Ask students to write a short summary of what they saw/read using a minimum of five prompts from the list.
5. Ask students to reflect on the value of these prompts in supporting their summarizing skills. Engage students in a class discussion where they share examples of their prompts and reflections.

Variation(s)

- You can write more examples for students and/or find more in an online search. You may also have students do the same. Your campus writing support centre may be able to support you and/or offer online relevant resources.



Summarizing and synthesizing



Activities to do with students

Downloadable activities with suggested guidelines that educators can do with students. Activities can be adopted/adapted as needed.

Activity: Know and Need to Know

Overview

Students use a pre-assessment strategy before reading or attending a class. Here, they identify what they already know and what they need to know. After reading or attending a class, students identify the information they obtained and what they'd like to know. Support these questions with feedback to inform course discussions and assignments.

Review the [Educator Activity Guide](#) before getting started with this activity.

Time

- Under 20 minutes
- 20 minutes to 1 hour
- More than 1 hour
- Over several classes

Format

- Individual
- In pairs
- Small groups
- Large groups
- Whole class

Modality

- In person
- Online synchronous
- Online asynchronous

Resources

- Module notes
- Paper
- Pen/pencil
- Laptop/tablet



Summarizing and synthesizing

Instructions

1. As a pre-assessment strategy before reading or before attending a class, give students an idea of what they should be looking for when they read by asking them to write down the following:
 - What they already know about the topic.
 - What they need to know about the topic.
2. After completing the reading or attending class, ask students to summarize the information to allow them to consolidate the reading/class material by describing:
 - What information they obtained about the topic.
 - What else they want to know about the topic.
3. Use this feedback to inform next steps as they relate to developing student-thinking and as they relate to designing relevant assessments.

Variation(s)

- Students can share their responses to the prompts in pairs or small groups to extend learning.

