

# MERIT PROJECT--SUMMARIZING NOTES

Back in 1986, I attended my first IRA conference. The pre-session I went to was put on by the “MERIT Project” from Philadelphia. I learned many wonderful things and while searching for summarizing ideas I uncovered information I had collected from this session. The following power notes are a modification of one handout.

## SUMMARIZING

1. **Purposes**
  2. To help you clarify your understanding of what has been read
  2. To help you select, organize, and briefly restate information from a written text
1. **Prepare for your summary**
  2. Skim the whole selection for main ideas
  2. Read more carefully two or three more times
    3. Important ideas will stand out
    3. Less important details will fall by the wayside
  2. Take notes -- include key ideas & important information
    3. Delete unnecessary information
    3. Combine similar & repeated information
    3. Substitute a general term for a list of items (e.g. furniture for table, chair, desk)
    3. Check back to the original text and make sure the information is from the author and not from your past experience
    3. Organize information in power notes or a power map
    3. Select a topic sentence (may be found in the author’s summary or introduction) or write a topic or power one sentence
1. **Write your first draft**
  2. Begin with your topic sentence
  2. Create additional sentences based on each of your power two concepts
1. **Check/Revise your summary**
  2. Compare your information with that of the author -- change/correct if necessary
  2. Check grammar & structure
1. **Write your final draft**

## TEACHING SUMMARIZING

In their article, “Teaching Students to Summarize”, (*Educational Leadership*, Dec., 1988/Jan., 1989, 26-28). Valerie Anderson and Suzanne Hidi present some interesting ideas on how teachers can improve their summary instruction. The following information is adapted from their material.

**The task.** Summarizing differs from other types of writing since the student does not generate his own ideas and details, but rather records the author’s main concepts with support. The task is one of identifying what main ideas must be included and what details can be eliminated. The writer needs to combine and reorganize information to consolidate it, and he needs to ensure that his information is in sync with the author’s intent.

**Material selection.** Early instruction works best with short, narrative selections in which the main ideas are clearly presented. An important part of these lessons is a discussion about what should be included and what should be left out -- the two key components of effective summarizing. If expository text is used, teachers should search for well-organized text where main ideas are explicit and easy to identify. Topics and concepts should be familiar to the students.

**The author's part.** The toughest part of summarizing is identifying the important points to be included. Although it may seem obvious to teachers when they assign that task, students often misunderstand. They may include insignificant details because *they* find them personally interesting. Teachers must emphasize that “main ideas” are those which are most important to the *author*.

Remember from the CRISS training and manual that considerate authors use signals to mark important information. Chapter Three in the manual deals with these signals and other patterns in the author's writing style. Students should be aware of *word* signals like “The most important reason is . . . .”, “The best response would be . . . .” Students also need to know *format* signals like *italics*, **bold** print, underlining, and **colored** print. These clues will help students determine the important ideas in a selection.

**Start early.** In order to provide students with adequate summarizing skills, teachers need to start basic summary instruction in the primary grades. As students progress through school, the summarizing lessons should continue with the tasks becoming more and more demanding.

We often hear from high school teachers in our workshops that only a few of their students have good summarizing skills. If we intend to improve this situation, we need to provide direct instruction in summary writing and opportunities to practice summarizing throughout a student's school experience.

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