



ONE-SENTENCE SUMMARIES

DESCRIPTION

In this activity, inspired by Burke's *The English Teacher's Companion* (1998), students will summarize main ideas and vital details in one sentence. There are five different types of one-sentence summaries: description, sequence, compare/contrast, cause/effect, and problem/solution. The purpose of the activity is to help students focus on the most important information. This activity can be used at the beginning of a lesson to activate prior knowledge or as an exit ticket. It can also be used as a check-in mid-lesson to assess student understanding before transitioning to new material. This activity is effective across content areas and grade levels. It works with text- and non-text-based lessons.

LEARNING STRATEGIES Connecting, Determining Importance, Synthesizing

LESSON PLAN STAGE Investigation, Synthesis

SKILLS Summarizing, Main Idea vs Details

PREPARATION

Prepare sentence starters for each of the one-sentence summary types.

ACTIVITY STEPS

TEACHING TIPS

1	Introduce One-Sentence Summaries	
2	Provide direct instruction of the five types of one-sentence summaries.	Explain each of the five one-sentence summary types: description, sequence, compare/contrast, cause/effect, and problem/solution. Review sentence starters for each type.
3	Model a one-sentence summary.	Read a passage or show a video clip. Based on that content, select one of the five types of summary sentences. Use the sentence starter to write a one-sentence summary. Think aloud for students and stress that the sentence includes the main idea and vital details.
4	Practice writing one-sentence summaries.	Students read a passage or watch a video clip, select the type, and write a one-sentence summary.



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ACTIVITY STEPS

TEACHING TIPS

5 Obtain peer feedback.

Students switch papers with a peer. They read and evaluate the summary.

- Did the students select the appropriate type of summary?
- Did the summary include the main idea and the vital details?

Students share feedback with each other. You may want to give students a form with the questions above to fill out as they evaluate their peer's sentences.

6 Repeat (optional).

One-sentence summaries could be written at various points in a lesson during a longer text reading. They could be used as an opening or closing to a lesson.

7 Reflect

Students can reflect individually or as a group, orally or in writing.

- Which is harder to write: a traditional summary or a one-sentence summary? Why?
- What was one piece of feedback you received from your partner that was helpful?
- How does writing a one-sentence summary help focus you on the most important information?
- When might you use this strategy again?