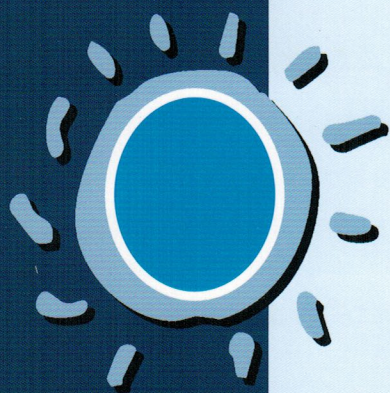


ENGLISH TEACHING *professional*

Issue 102

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Attentive listening

Peter Zoeflig

Cracking contraption, Gromit!

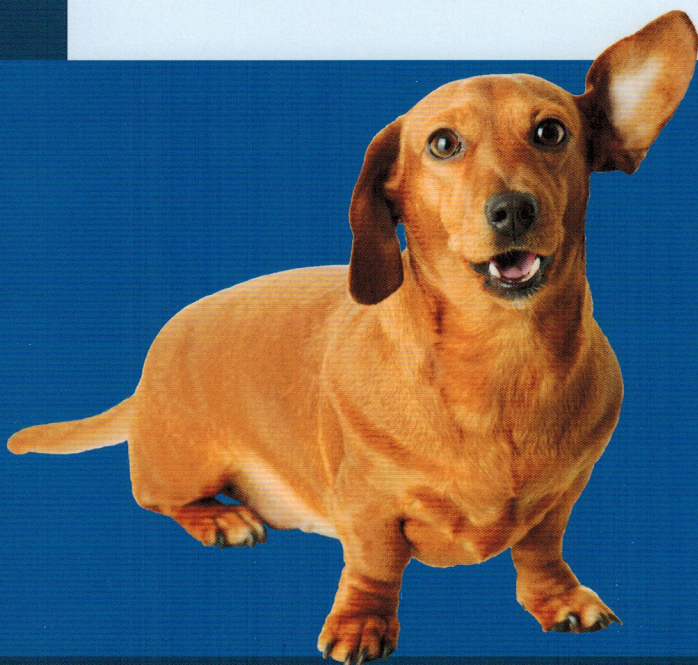
Daniel Mills and Sean Toland

Motivation to write

Barbara Gęsicka

Role reversal

Edwina Ingrouille



- practical methodology
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- tips & techniques
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Summing it all up

Aida Rodomanchenko
tenders some tips and techniques for teaching summarising.

What is the expression in your students' eyes when you say 'Well, now, who'd like to summarise the text?' Frustration and despair. And when you say 'Any volunteers?', I bet there are none! We all know that summarising is a crucial skill for academic and professional success and that we need to develop it in our students, but we rarely do it in a creative and innovative way. The outcome is all too often a shambles.

I have been leading a preparatory course for professional exams in TESOL for a couple of years. At the end of the course, as part of an exam, my students have to make an oral summary of a written text. I have a whole term to hone their summarising skills and, at first, I started by using traditional approaches. Most of my students became sick and tired of hearing about topic sentences, main ideas, major and minor supporting details, etc, yet they were still unable to produce a cohesive and coherent summary. And even those who managed to write one found it difficult to make a presentation of it without reading their summary out from the paper.

Getting the students to summarise properly and to be able to present their summaries orally was a challenge for me – and one that I was eager to overcome. I started experimenting, and eventually worked out a number of techniques which proved to be effective both in teaching the students how to summarise

texts and in developing their general communicative skills.

This article offers some tips and techniques that I have found helpful.

Tip 1 **Motivate through day-to-day experience.**

Begin by asking your students when they need to make summaries in their daily lives. Brainstorm ideas and put all their suggestions on the board. Once they realise that summaries are something they actually do in their everyday lives of their own free will, they should be less reluctant to study summarising skills in an academic context.

Tip 2 **Demonstrate with familiar material.**

As a preliminary task, ask the students to summarise a well-known fairytale (eg *Cinderella*, *Little Red Riding Hood* or *Sleeping Beauty*). There's a good chance that instead of summarising, they'll start retelling the plot, as not many students know the difference. When retelling a story, we tend to present facts and opinions, following the logic of the author, and we include as many details as possible. A summary, in contrast, should consist of only of the most important points, generally involving a single main idea backed up by around three

supporting ideas, which may not be given in the same order as they appear in the original. Explain the difference between a summary and a retelling, and then encourage the students to have another try, summarising the story from the point of view of one of the characters (eg Cinderella, Prince Charming or even Cinderella's stepmother). You should be able to demonstrate that each character has a different perspective on the story. Point out that in each character's summary, there will be a different main idea (dependent on their own particular viewpoint), and that these main ideas will each need different supporting arguments.

Tip 3

Use guided discovery.

Instead of lecturing the students on the main features of a good summary and what they must do to produce one, use a 'guided discovery' approach. Prepare a text which has all the information you would give the students in a lecture on summarising, but include in it a number of factual mistakes, eg *The purpose of a summary is to give the reader an account of all the details of a text*. Divide the class into teams, giving each team a copy of your text. Ask them to work together to correct the mistakes, eg *The purpose of a summary is to give the reader an account of the main ideas of a text*. Either set a time limit or do it as a competition: The winners are the first team to correct all the mistakes. Alternatively, you could jumble the stages of writing a summary and ask the students to put them in the correct order.

Tip 4

Encourage peer evaluation and feedback.

Ensure that when one student is giving an oral summary, the others are listening actively – not chatting, tweeting or posting photos on Facebook! Develop checklists and score charts which can be used for self-assessment and for peer evaluation. You can also use these later to grade the students' summaries. Create an atmosphere in which the students feel confident, are eager to ask questions related to the topic of the summary and willingly give feedback to each other on what was good about a summary and what needs improvement. By becoming accustomed

to evaluating each other's work, they will start noticing their own mistakes – and will learn to eliminate them.

Tip 5

Do a chain summary.

For homework, give the students an article that can be summarised from different perspectives and ask them to make a word diagram with a main idea in the middle and supporting arguments at the ends of lines coming out from it. In the next lesson, put the students in groups according to the main idea they have chosen. Give each group 10–15 minutes to compare and combine their diagrams to make a perfect one. Encourage them to think of the logic of the summary and the discourse markers that will need to be used. Finally, get each group of students to present a summary orally, taking turns to speak. So, one student from the group starts summarising the text, is then stopped by the teacher and the next student steps in to proceed with the summary. This team-building activity will motivate the students to listen to one other as they will need to be ready to start speaking at any point.

Tip 6

Practise handling interruptions.

For homework, ask the students to make a summary of a text and to write five questions which are based on it or connected with the topic. In class, one student starts to make an oral summary of the text while others interrupt by asking questions. The aim of the student making the summary is to finish it without losing their train of thought, at the same time answering the questions.

Tip 7

Organise a press conference.

Boost the students' confidence by showing that giving speeches and answering questions are not that difficult if you know the topic in advance. At the end of a lesson, ask each student to name something they are an expert in. Write the topics on the board next to the students' names and ask each student to take a photo of it.

Tell them that in the next lesson they each have to give an overview of their topic in two minutes and then be ready to answer questions. First, they prepare questions for each other, by searching the internet and writing three to five questions on each topic. In the next lesson, have a series of 'press conferences', with panels of three or four students at a time giving their speeches and each answering two questions from the audience. The speaker's aim is to answer the questions politely. The questions can be given to the speakers in advance, but they won't know which two will actually be asked.

Tip 8

Let them cheat.

It is common knowledge that students will often use each other's ideas and notes when they haven't done the required preparation themselves. Devote a lesson to cheating and you'll teach the students that sometimes it's not that easy or useful. Give your students three articles for homework and ask them to choose one on which to take notes, make an outline summary or create a word diagram. In the next lesson, group them according to which article they chose. Ask the members of each group to swap their notes, summaries and word diagrams with someone from another group and then to make a summary on the spot, using their friend's work. Even though everyone will have read all the articles at home in order to choose one, it will turn out to be a very tough task.

Tip 9

Set a time limit.

Another strategy which works for my students is a time limit. Give the students 20 minutes to read the article 'Five events that shaped the history of the English language' by Philip Durkin (www.oxforddictionaries.com/words/the-history-of-english). Tell them to make a word diagram or outline based on it and then to be ready to make a summary of the whole text in front of the class. The first person chosen (or volunteering) to make a summary is given as much time as they need, but the others have a strict time limit and are stopped as soon as that time is up. To encourage the students to identify the

Summing it all up

most important information, it's worth giving the second student to make the summary a six-minute limit and then gradually reducing the limit for each student down to one minute, so that each time they are forced to jettison the least important information and concentrate on what really matters.

Tip 10

Use different sources.

Oral presentations, such as TED talks (www.ted.com), are also useful for teaching summarising skills. Choose two talks which are easy to summarise because they have a clear structure with an explicit set of reasons supporting a main idea, two talks with more implicit supporting ideas, and two talks where a visual element distracts the audience and even provides ideas different from those presented by the speaker. An example of this is a TED talk called 'The magic of truth and lies' given by Marco Tempest. Most of my students were so mesmerised by the magic tricks he performs that they considered the use of technology in making tricks to be the main idea of the talk, which is not the case. Ask the students to watch the talks and make summaries. Of course, they can take notes while they are watching, but they are likely to be so engaged by the presentation that will have to make spontaneous summaries with no aids.

Recommended articles and TED talks for teaching summarising

Articles

'Five events that shaped the history of the English language' by Philip Durkin (www.oxforddictionaries.com/words/the-history-of-english)

'Globalization and cultural identity' by John Tomlinson (<http://arsiv.setav.org/ups/dosya/27905.pdf>)

'You have to catch them young' published in *The European* magazine (found at <http://forum.famouswhy.com/index.php?showtopic=2936>)

'Interpreting interlanguage' by David Crystal (www.davidcrystal.com/DC_articles/Internet8.pdf)

TED talks

'A TED speaker's worst nightmare' by Colin Robertson (www.ted.com/talks/a_ted_speaker_s_worst_nightmare)

'Less stuff, more happiness' by Graham Hill (www.ted.com/talks/graham_hill_less_stuff_more_happiness)

'A story of mixed emoticons' by Rives (www.ted.com/talks/rives_tells_a_story_of_mixed_emoticons)

'The magic of truth and lies' by Marco Tempest (www.youtube.com/watch?v=fumsXEuiLyk)

'8 secrets of success' by Richard St John (www.ted.com/talks/richard_st_john_s_8_secrets_of_success)

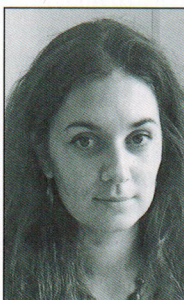
'Try it for 30 days' by Matt Cutts (www.ted.com/talks/matt_cutts_try_something_new_for_30_days)

'Art made of storms' by Nathalie Miebach (www.ted.com/talks/nathalie_miebach)

'Why is "x" the unknown?' by Terry Moore (www.ted.com/talks/terry_moore_why_is_x_the_unknown)



These are the strategies that I have used in order to teach my students how to summarise texts, boost their confidence in giving public speeches, answer questions from an audience and handle interjections. Even if you don't have enough time to do them all, I recommend that you try some of them and see what happens. **ETp**



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PICTURE PUZZLE

Answers

Theme: Teaching techniques
scaffolding, drilling, feedback, teaching unplugged, focus on forms

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