An Effective Way To Summarize Challenging Articles

Adam Crosby

Introduction
The Department of Business Administration at Kinki University has a firm goal of raising the proficiency level of the students’ English ability. This goal has led to the use of challenging and business-like materials in class. An effective method to evaluate a student’s English comprehension and oral ability is through summarizing. Summarizing is an effective way to ensure how much knowledge a students has retained or grasped of a particular article. Buckley (2004) says summarizing is the process of reducing text to less than its original size, clearly articulating the author’s thoughts, opinion, and meaning while retaining the main ideas. The particular article reviewed in this paper was challenging for most of the students, and certainly above the level of comprehension in terms of vocabulary and grammar for some of them. However, as part of the faculty goal of increasing the English level of the students, the skill of summarizing a business article was introduced. This meant an effective method had to be devised so that even the lowest level students in the Writing A class of 29 students were able to comprehend and explain the contents of the article in proficient English. This was a very big challenge; however, I believe, after reflecting on the lesson, and reviewing the anonymous feedback survey given at the end of the class that the task was successful with 25 of the 27 students present stating that they felt the class helped them comprehend a business article. This article and summarizing exercise was introduced in week 3 of a 15 week semester in order to customize the students to the skill of summarizing.

Keywords: summary, summarizing
Article: Fast Food Trend: A Growing Industry
Time Frame: 1 period of 90 minutes
Class: Writing A
Step 1: Preview the vocabulary before looking at the article
As this article contains difficult vocabulary that is rarely encountered in everyday situations, it was important to ensure the students had a good understanding of the vocabulary so that they didn’t become frustrated from the outset. The vocabulary that was expected to be difficult was written on the board and the students tried to collectively write a synonym and/or antonym list for each word. This created a group work atmosphere from the beginning.

Step 2: Quiz your partner on the vocabulary
Next, the students quizzed each other on the vocabulary from step 1. This created a challenge and helped with vocabulary retention.

Step 3: Read the article
This article was selected due to its ideal length and level of difficulty for a 90 minute class. The students were instructed to read the article aloud with a partner concentrating on rhythm and pronunciation. Steps 1 and 2 ensured there were no words that needed explaining; however, if a student encountered an unknown word, they were encouraged to ask their partner for help.

Step 4: Write questions for each paragraph
The students wrote content-based questions about each paragraph. This question formation step provides a challenge if there are any students who are returnees, or have a much higher English level than the rest of the class. It is also effective for the lower level students as they can participate without feeling left out, and they can improve their question forming technique. Below are examples of questions from both higher and lower level students.

Examples of basic question formation
What company did he work at?
What did he do at J & J?

Examples of higher question formation
Which pharmaceutical company was he employed at?
What were his responsibilities at J & J?
Questions like the ones above were written on the board by the students. It is beneficial to have students write questions that are similar such as the ones above to demonstrate there are many ways of asking the same question. In this particular class, one higher level student managed to write 14 questions in the time permitted.

**Step 5: Find answers to the questions**

The students now verbally answer the questions in groups or with a partner. This becomes challenging as some of the questions are difficult. I encouraged eye contact by asking the students to look at the questions on the board, remember one, and then ask their partner while maintaining eye contact. This is helpful for fluency and also provides a challenge.

**Step 6: The summary: Say the answers to the questions using joiners and conjunctions to summarize**

This is actually easier than it sounds. In small groups or pairs, the students summarize the article, or part of it, together or in turn. It could be made more difficult by erasing the questions on the board, however, if there are many students who are struggling, I recommend leaving the questions on the board. The summary is simply answering each question on the board using conjunctions and joiners. Demonstrate with a stronger student to encourage the class, or write it on the board. This summary can be done verbally or written.

**Summary without joiners and conjunctions (lower level students)**

*Fernandez Leopoldo worked at Johnson and Johnson. It is a pharmaceutical company. He sold goods.*

**Summary using joiners and conjunctions (higher level students)**

*Fernandez Leopoldo worked at Johnson and Johnson which is a pharmaceutical company. He sold medical equipment there.*

It may be necessary to remind the students that they should not say the questions. They only have to answer the questions using joiners and conjunctions if possible.
Step 7: Full Summary
This is an extra step if time permits. Put student A with student B creating pairs. Student A explains the summary to student B. Student B can listen and take notes. Alternatively, as another exercise for variation, Student B can listen to A and take note of any Katakana pronunciation heard during the summary. This can be done with the questions removed from the board to create an extra element, or if the level of the class is low, leave the questions on the board.

Step 8: Motivate the class by having a student demonstrate
If the instructor thinks necessary, choose a student who did well to summarize in front of the class. This will help motivate and encourage the other students by showing a summary of a difficult article is possible. Honna and Takeshita noted that it is beneficial for the students to be motivated by each other.

*Japanese students passive attitudes in using this language as a means of international communication and intercultural communication. They are ashamed if they do not speak English as native speakers do.*
*(Honna and Takeshita, 2000:63)*

Homework
As this is a writing class, students were instructed to write a summary of the entire article. This homework was checked in lesson 4.

Conclusion
Looking back on this lesson, I was very pleased how it went. I found this summarizing technique to be successful for the following reasons:

- Teacher was passive in class
- Students were active
- Good for question formation
- Good for vocabulary
- Good for student-student interaction
- Good for note-taking
- Good for writing
Raised the bar and expectations
Students felt a sense of accomplishment doing a difficult article
This lesson can be done focusing on writing, speaking, or both

Fast Food Trend: A Growing Industry
Spain – Fernandez Leopoldo was an executive for a well-known pharmaceutical company when he decided to open a pizza business on the side. He had plenty of money to fund his side business as his annual salary at Johnson & Johnson was around $150,000.

“My job at Johnson & Johnson involved selling heart monitors, surgical equipment and drugs so I knew nothing about pizza,” said the 47 year old American. Now, six years later, Fernandez is the president of TelePizza, a multinational company with projected sales of $120 million this year. The company has grown at an astonishing rate and there are 200 outlets in more than 10 other countries, and 300 stores in Spain. TelePizza was the first to answer the demand for home-delivered fast foods in Spain. Fernandez originally planned to open a small pizza shop and keep his well-paid job at Johnson & Johnson, but due to the remarkable growth of the chain, he decided to invest everything he had into his business. Success happened “so quickly my biggest problem has been keeping up on top of the growth management, people management, and training. We’ve grown at 10 percent a month since we opened,” Fernandez said. As his first shop prospered in Madrid in 1986, he quit his job, sold his house and stocks and invested $300,000 into the business opening new stores in Spain and then abroad. Fernandez saw an opportunity for the pizza delivery market as at the time he launched his business, pizzas were only available in Italian restaurants and the food delivery service was rare. But with more and more women entering the workforce, there was a growing need for fast foods. Similar to Pizza Hut and Domino’s Pizza, Telepizza is guaranteed to arrive in under 30 minutes. The price is reasonable with a large pizza costing $13, compared to a big Mac set for $6 undelivered. However, critics say that the boom in fast food and delivery services is creating a generation of unhealthy people and related diseases such as diabetes (high blood sugar).

Secret of Financial Success for TelePizza
Why is Fernandez successful? He was a refugee from Cuba and escaped with his family to America, then joined the army. “My advantage is that I understand Spanish mentality better than Americans do, and I understand Americans better than Spanish do,” Fernandez said. The company has a fleet of more than 2000 motorbikes in Spain and sells 25,000 pizzas daily in the Spanish market. The company has also started a franchise system: two-thirds of the domestic outlets in Spain are franchise owned while 90 percent of the 40 stores abroad are company operated. “We plan to expand into the U.S. in due time,” Fernandez said. “For now we are maturing and learning from growth markets”

Source: fundinguniverse.com
References


SURVEY
Do not write your name.

1. This vocabulary in this article was difficult? Yes No
2. I enjoyed working with my partner? Yes No
3. The vocabulary quiz helped me remember vocabulary? Yes No
4. Writing and answering the questions helped me understand the article? Yes No
5. This lesson helped me understand the article? Yes No

Disclaimer: Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decline to answer any question you do not wish to. Should the data be published, no individual information will be disclosed.

Table of Results

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X Question
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Date Administered: April 22, 2014
Number of Valid Respondents: 27