

7 RULES FOR SUMMARIZING

Summarizing is a pretty demanding cognitive task for readers at all levels. They have to take what they read and decide what information to keep, what to discard, what to combine and what to substitute.

It takes a lot of instruction and practice for our students to be able to summarize effectively, but it's worth taking the time. In fact, Robert Marzano has identified summarizing as one of the nine "High Yield" Instructional Strategies across content areas and grade levels.

Here are seven rules for summarizing:

1. Make sure to include all information that is important.
2. Leave out information that's not important (extra supporting details or description).
3. Put the details in the same order in which they appear in the text.
4. Don't repeat information, even if it's repeated in the text.
5. Use key vocabulary from the text when you can.
6. Combine ideas or events that go together.
7. Use category words instead of lists of words (e.g. *vegetables* instead of *carrots, beans and corn*).

A sample passage and teacher think-aloud may be found on the next page. After modeling your thinking about the passage, you might construct the summary together with the students as a shared writing experience. Of course, there are different ways to summarize this passage, but one example might be:

In the morning, the character is hungry and thirsty and doesn't feel well. But he needs to keep going because two people at the crash site need him. He finally finds some water to drink, but by afternoon, he is so hungry that he eats some berries, even though they made him sick the night before. By night time, he is exhausted and bug-bitten and wonders if he's ever going to get home.



Lost in the Woods

It was morning and the dawn light had turned everything reddish-orange. When my heart stopped pounding, I realized that I was thirsty and hungry. Even worse, those berries I'd eaten the night before weren't sitting in my stomach too well. That's all I needed — to start throwing up again.

So I started off, my mouth dry and my stomach heaving. I had a full day of walking ahead of me and there were two people back at the crash site who were depending on me. I was determined to keep on going, no matter how queasy I felt.

I came across water two hours later. It was only a small stream, but as far as I was concerned, it was the best water I'd ever tasted. I was so starved I would have eaten my shoes. I decided to risk some of the berries again, despite what they did to my stomach.

By sundown, I was exhausted and had been eaten alive by bugs. If a bear had come by, I wouldn't have had any fight left in me. But no bears came even close, although I saw a few of them in the distance. I sat down under a pine tree, looked up at the dying light and wondered if I'd ever make it home again.

Passage adapted from [Our Plane is Down](#) by Doug Paton.

I think the time of day is important but the rest is extra description – interesting, but not important. I don't need to include heart pounding. I can just tell that the character is thirsty and hungry and not feeling too well.

The first sentence just repeats what we already know – he's sick and thirsty. But the rest is important! There are two people at the crash site who need him, so he has to keep walking.

Finally he finds water to drink. By afternoon, he's so hungry he decides to eat the berries, even though they made him sick last night.

By sunset, he's exhausted and bitten by bugs. He wonders if he'll ever get home again.

