

Teaching Video Summary Technique to ESL/EFL Students

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- **Technique:** to teach students how to summarize a short CNN/BBC video report in 5 sentences
- **Student level:** High intermediate and above
- **Materials:** A CNN/BBC video report, between 2-3 minutes ideally
- **Class time:** One hour or more

Why Use Video in the Classroom?

Many students at this level have had years of textbooks. They are usually much more interested in watching videos. In particular, news videos have one major advantage over textbooks: they are up-to-the-minute.

Why Summarize a Video Report?

Because this is a very useful thinking skill. Students must select the essential points only from all the information they have, and fit that information together so that it flows logically and connects appropriately.

Why Summarize a Video Report in 5 Sentences?

Obviously, this number of sentences is not set in stone, but this length does help students work on being very selective with content and on writing very concisely.

What is a Summary?

A summary provides the essential points of a story (report, presentation etc.) in a general, logical, and connected way.

Summaries do NOT include these areas (these belong in a retelling):

- Background to the issue
- Minor details
- The student's own opinion
- Statistics (e.g. 72% of people...)
- Detailed explanations
- Direct quotes

If students are not sure of the difference between a summary and a retelling, tell them to consider how we might talk about a movie we've just seen.

This is a plot summary (general, essential points only):

"It's a love story based in a New York hospital. A middle-aged doctor meets a nurse who"

This is a retelling (specific points, data, background etc):

"It's a love story based in a New York hospital. It's the biggest hospital in the city with over 50 doctors, 17 nurses, and about 200 beds, but even so there usually aren't enough doctors to deal with all the cases. Anyway, one day, a 57 year old surgeon..."

Teaching the 5-sentence Summary

The Week Before

Ideally, teach a listening class on the video itself the week before. This is so that students understand fully the video content before attempting the summary (summary skills are difficult: the first time you teach it, you will probably need at least an hour). Students should then be instructed to review their notes on the video for homework, especially any new vocabulary.

On the Day: Step 1: Warm-up Discussion

At the start of the summary class, show the video one more time to refresh the students' memory. Next, write the task on the whiteboard (to summarize the report in 5 sentences). Last, put students into pairs. Ask them to discuss with their partner these questions:

Q1: What is a good summary? (general, essential, logical, connected, concise)

Q2: Which of these might be included in a summary?

- Essential information (yes)
- Minor information (no)
- Background information (no)
- The main topic and why it's news (yes)
- Long explanations (no)
- Statistics (no)
- Direct quotes (no)
- A conclusion (yes)
- Your personal opinion (no)
- The opinion of people in the video (yes)

Q3: How should you write the summary? Think about these points:

- Type of language (formal)
- 5 separate sentences or 1 complete paragraph (the latter)
- Language to connect sentences together (As a result; In addition; In conclusion etc.)

Step 2: Writing Sentence 1

In their pairs, students should work together to discuss their ideas for the first sentence. Tell them this should start with the sentence head: 'This report focuses on...' and go on to include the main focus of the report (what, where) and why the topic is news now.

From my experience, the main focus is usually not difficult for students (e.g. teenage crime in Japan; AIDS battle in South Africa etc.). What is difficult is why it is news now -- AIDS in South Africa is not a new issue, so why has it been on TV recently?

Technique: The teacher will need to help students here by writing on the whiteboard media phrases that indicate that something new is happening (these are sometimes called topicality focusers). Examples include: 'a new challenge/ plan/ policy (etc.) to...'; 'a new controversy over...'; 'growing concerns over...'; 'new efforts to...'). Impose a time limit. Remember, keep the task communicative by having students discuss their ideas first before writing it down. Then elicit answers and give feedback.

Step 2: Writing Sentences 2, 3 and 4

These sentences are the most difficult to write because students are trying to encapsulate the body of the report by selecting from all the pieces of information the 3 most significant.

Tell them that CNN/BBC video reports usually follow logical stages. Below are some popular examples of report organization with the body sections in bold. Write these on the whiteboard.

(Since most news is bad news, the most common type of reports deals with problems).

Introduction	Introduction
Background	Problem
Problem	Cause
Cause	Effect
Solution	Consequence
Opinions	Opinions
Conclusion	Conclusion

Tell students that sentences 2, 3 and 4 from their summary should be selected from the body sections of the report. Which ones the students select depends on the content of the report, obviously. Tell them there is no perfect summary: several versions can all be acceptable. If students decide to include the opinions sections of the report, tell them that direct quotes are not to be used; instead, they should write, for example: 'According to the government,' or 'The government believes...' etc.

Have students discuss in pairs first which three body categories they will choose from the video report to produce their three body sentences of the summary. Then, have them discuss how they should write them. Finally, have them write out the sentences, encouraging them to connect the sentences together logically. Set a time limit for this. Finally, elicit from the pairs and give feedback.

Step 3: Writing Sentence 5

This is usually the easiest sentence to write for students. The conclusion to most reports talks about the future, either optimistically or not, and gives the reason for this view, often as an adjective. The students' sentence 5 should do the same.

Step 4: Appraising the Summaries

Now it is time to hear the whole summary from each pairing, and to see which ones are best. Appraisal style depends on student level, class size, lesson duration, classroom equipment level etc. These are some suggestions:

Student pairs write out their summary, working together on grammatical accuracy. Then each pair reads it out (student A reads sentence 1, then student B reads sentence 2 etc.). The class pairs listen and grade each one out of 10 as they hear it. Ask why the summary with the highest score sounded so good.

For small classes, have students write out the summary on magnetic whiteboards placed on the wall. Instead of pairs, at the start of class you could group students into threes or fours. Again, the groups help each other with grammar. When finished, arrange the boards near each other; have students compare and vote. Give feedback.

If there is no class time, have students write out their summary for homework. Next class, distribute photocopies of your own 5-sentence summary for students to compare theirs to.