

GOAL III

DURING READING: GET THE GIST OF PARAGRAPHS

GOAL III: GET THE GIST OF PARAGRAPHS

OVERVIEW AND EXAMPLES

OUTCOME

Students learn to find the main idea of short sections of text.

DESCRIPTION

Students should already be successful using the get the gist strategy for sentences (see Goal II). Students can also use the get the gist strategy to find the main idea of a paragraph or short section of text:

1. Retell the paragraph in your own words.
2. Get the gist:
 - a. Say the most important “who” or “what.”
 - b. Tell the most important information about the “who” or “what.”
 - c. Write the gist in 10 or fewer words.

STEP 1: RETELL THE PARAGRAPH

The first step in getting the gist is to begin to recall what happened in the paragraph.

TEACHER-MODELED PHASE

Model for students by reading a short paragraph aloud and retelling what takes place.

Christopher Columbus was a trader and sea captain. Europeans traded with countries in Asia for many things, including spices and other goods. But traveling from Europe to Asia took a long time and was very difficult. Columbus wanted to save time by sailing west across the Atlantic Ocean. He presented his plan to the king and queen of Spain, who agreed to let him try.

Teacher: I know this paragraph is about Christopher Columbus because he is mentioned a few times. He was a sea captain and a trader. Europeans traded a lot in Asia. It took a long time to get to Asia to trade, so Christopher Columbus wanted to try a shortcut by sailing west instead of east. There are a lot of details in that paragraph.

TEACHER-SUPPORTED PHASE

Retelling can be challenging for many students.

Begin with paragraphs that are straightforward and easy to understand. Students should have a high rate of success when they are learning to retell. Once students are comfortable with the strategy and demonstrate mastery, teachers can increase text difficulty.

Ask guiding questions that lead students to retell what happened in their own words. Questions are usually specific to the paragraph but might include some of the following:

- Is there an important person? If so, who is it? How do you know he or she is important? What are some things that happen to the important person?
- Is there an important place? If so, where is it? How do you know it is important?
- When does it take place?

The following questions could be used to guide a student who is struggling to retell the Christopher Columbus paragraph:

- Who is the paragraph mostly about?
- It doesn't say exactly, but can you tell what kind of work Christopher Columbus did that made him interested in trade routes?
- Why did Christopher Columbus want to find a different way to get to Asia?
- What else did you learn from this paragraph?
- Start with Christopher Columbus and tell in your own words the most important ideas from this paragraph. It's OK to use some of the ideas we just talked about.

Students who require guiding questions should still be encouraged to retell the paragraph to help them put the ideas together in their own words.

STEP 2: GET THE GIST

TEACHER-MODELED PHASE

Introduce get the gist for paragraphs. It may be helpful to display the following card (also found in Appendix B) as an overhead image or poster.

GET THE GIST OF PARAGRAPHS

1. What is the most important "who" or "what?"
2. What is the most important idea about the "who" or "what?"
3. Write the gist in 10 or fewer words in your learning log.

Teacher: I will introduce a strategy that can help you figure out the most important ideas of what you read. It's similar to the strategy we use for confusing sentences, but this time, it's for longer sections of text. The strategy is called the same thing: get the gist.

Just like with sentences, first you figure out the most important “who” or “what” in the paragraph. The next step is to figure out the most important information about the “who” or “what.” The last step is to tell the most important idea in 10 or fewer words.

When getting the gist for a larger section of text, like a paragraph, you have to look through more information to tell only the most important ideas in 10 or fewer words. The work you just did to retell what the paragraph is about will help you with your gist.

Model getting the gist with a short paragraph. You can use the same paragraph you used to model the retell or another one. The following example uses the same paragraph (reposted below, for your reference). Have students put away their learning logs, so they focus on your modeling, not on writing what you say. Model writing the ideas on the board or an overhead as you think aloud. Explicitly state the reasoning behind your choices.

Christopher Columbus was a trader and sea captain. Europeans traded with countries in Asia for many things, including spices and other goods. But traveling from Europe to Asia took a long time and was very difficult. Columbus wanted to save time by sailing west across the Atlantic Ocean. He presented his plan to the king and queen of Spain, who agreed to let him try.

Teacher: There is a lot of information in this paragraph, but let’s see whether we can figure out who or what it is mostly about.

I think the most important “who” or “what” is a Christopher Columbus because most of the ideas in the paragraph are about him. He was a sea captain and a trader. He wanted to find a shorter route to Asia to make trading easier. He asked the king and queen to let him find a shorter route.

There is also information about trading goods such as spices, but it seems to be mostly about Christopher Columbus.

[Note the following on the board or overhead.]

MOST IMPORTANT “WHO” OR “WHAT”:

Christopher Columbus

Continue thinking aloud, identifying and listing the most important information about the “who” or “what.” Identify any details and explain that details may be interesting and help you understand the passage, but they do not belong in the gist because they are not the most important ideas.

Teacher: I found the most important “who.” Now, I will look at the card for the next step.

[Display the card.]

The second part of get the gist is to find the most important thing about the “who” or “what.”

[Display the paragraph.]

What is the most important thing this paragraph says about Christopher Columbus? Let’s see, he was a sea captain and a trader. He wanted to find a shorter route to Asia to make trading easier. He asked the king and queen to let him find a shorter route.

Hmm, I think I’ve got it. I think the most important thing about Christopher Columbus is that he wanted to find a shorter route to Asia to make trading easier.

I’ll write that.

MOST IMPORTANT “WHO” OR “WHAT”:

Christopher Columbus

MOST IMPORTANT IDEA:

Wanted to find a shorter route to Asia to make trading easier

Continue thinking aloud as you create a gist. Explain that a good gist is a complete sentence of 10 or fewer words. The “who” or “what” counts as only one word, even if it is actually longer.

NOTE: As the subsequent case studies will demonstrate, some teachers allow gists to go a little longer than 10 words. The word limit is designed to prevent students from adding extraneous details to their gists. This concept is what is most important—not an exact number of words.

An easy way to understand how to write a gist is as an arithmetic problem. Step 1 (who or what) + Step 2 (important information) = Step 3 (a gist). So, $1 + 2 = 3$.

Teacher: Now for the last step: Write the gist in 10 or fewer words. So I'm going to combine my first step—the "who" or "what"—with the second step—the most important idea—to get the gist.

The "who" or "what" counts as only one word, even if it's more than one. So *Christopher Columbus* counts as only one word. I will count the words in my most important idea:

[Model using your fingers to count.]

Christopher Columbus wanted to find a shorter route to Asia to make trading easier.

That's 13. Is there anything here that's not important? *To make trading easier* doesn't seem as important as finding a shorter route to Asia, so I'll try cutting that.

[Model using your fingers to count.]

Christopher Columbus wanted to find a shorter route to Asia.

That's nine words. So I'll write that.

MOST IMPORTANT "WHO" OR "WHAT":

Christopher Columbus

MOST IMPORTANT IDEA:

Wanted to find a shorter route to Asia to make trading easier

GIST:

Christopher Columbus wanted to find a shorter route to Asia.

Teacher: It doesn't have all the details, but it will help me remember the most important idea from the paragraph.

You may wish to review the strategy, if time allows. Example questions include the following:

- When do I use this strategy? (during reading)
- What do I do in Step 1? (identify the most important "who" or "what")
- What do I do in Step 2? (identify the most important information about the "who" or "what")
- Why do I not include details? (they are interesting but not as important)
- What makes a good gist? (a complete sentence that states the most important information about the "who" or "what" in 10 or fewer words)

If you have extra time, discuss with students how they can apply the strategy to other classes.

TEACHER-SUPPORTED PHASE

Spend several sessions practicing get the gist with students.

Support whole-class gist writing. On the first day of teacher-supported instruction, use questioning to review when to use the strategy, what the strategy entails, and that students should not include details. Remind students of the $1 + 2 = 3$ trick to help them remember.

- Select a short paragraph or passage.
- Read the paragraph with students and then ask students to retell it to a partner or to the teacher. Use guiding questions to assist.
- Ask students to figure out the "who" or "what" together. Use questioning to guide students.
- Ask students to share the most important "who" or "what" and discuss with the class. Have students write it in their learning logs.
- Ask students to identify the most important ideas about the "who" or "what" with their partners. Remind students that this information tells you what the "who" or "what" is or does. Have students share their ideas with the group and write them in their learning logs.
- Lead students to write a class gist. Make sure that the gist meets the criteria of a good gist: a complete sentence that tells the most important information (no details) about the most important "who" or "what" in 10 or fewer words. Have students write their gist statements in their learning logs.

Support partner gist writing. For further scaffolding, lead students through the same exercise, but have partners create gists together. Lead partners through the steps and then give feedback about their gist statements.

- Ask students to share their gists. Write a few gists on the board. If two students have the same gist, put a check mark next to it.
- Ask students to look at the gists on the board to see whether they can determine which is most accurate. Ask students to think about ways that even the most accurate gist might be improved. Working together to further develop gists can be helpful to students.
- Provide feedback about the gists, noting when the information is correct and when students have used details instead of the most important idea. Also point out that there may be more than one “correct” gist.

Support independent gist writing. As students become more proficient at gist writing, allow them to work more independently. They can use the card on their own to write gists; however, for all students, continue to provide assistance and feedback. It is also important to monitor student’s gist-writing progress, using their learning logs.

TEACHER-MODELED GET THE GIST OF PARAGRAPHS LESSON 8 OUTLINE

OUTCOME

Students learn how to find the main idea of short sections of text.

PREPARATION

- Identify a paragraph to use.
 - Prepare a model of retelling and getting the gist.
 - Prepare the text and learning logs for students.
 - Prepare the text, card, and learning log to display on the board or overhead.
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STEP 1: CONDUCT PREVIEW (OPTIONAL; SEE GOAL I)

1. Present the “big ideas.”
2. Preteach important vocabulary.
3. Predict.

STEP 2: CONDUCT BREAKDOWN (OPTIONAL; SEE GOAL II)

Think aloud as you read the paragraph, using the same cards or posters students will use to guide the breakdown process and recording information on the learning log.

1. Read a paragraph or short section of text.
2. Have students mark words and sentences they do not understand.

3. Have students work with a partner, using the Word Fix-Up Strategies card to find the meaning of unknown words and to write the words and brief definitions in their learning logs.
4. Have students work with a partner, using the Get the Gist (Sentences) card to get the gist of one or more confusing sentences.

STEP 3: MODEL GET THE GIST OF PARAGRAPHS

1. Tell students that getting the gist of paragraphs is very similar to getting the gist of sentences. Explain the steps to students:
 - Retell the paragraph in your own words.
 - Get the gist.
 - Say the most important “who” or “what.”
 - Tell the most important information about the “who” or “what.”
 - Write the gist in 10 or fewer words.

NOTE: The teacher in the following case study used a word limit of 10 to 15 words, rather than 10 or fewer words. Remember that the purpose of setting a word limit—helping students to omit details and write concise gists—is more important than the exact number of words.
2. Model reading a short paragraph aloud and retelling what takes place.
3. Demonstrate how to move from retelling to writing a gist. Use the Get the Gist (Paragraphs) card to guide you. Model how to use your fingers to count the words in a gist. Model writing your gist in your learning log.
4. For each section or paragraph, repeat steps 2 and 3.

NEXT STEPS

- Provide additional examples of retelling and finding the gist of a paragraph.
- When students demonstrate understanding of what a gist is for a paragraph, when to find the gist, and how to find the gist, move on to Lesson 9.

LESSON 8 CASE STUDY

OBJECTIVE

Students learn how to find the main idea of short sections of text by using get the gist.

MATERIALS

- Copies of a short passage or chapter
- Learning logs
- Pencils

TIPS

- Allow 5–6 minutes for preview (see Goal I), if time allows.
- Students need to write only the vocabulary words (not their definitions).
- Have some possible unknown words ready, in case students do not identify any.
- Posting the following information on the board will save preparation time before class.

PAGES:	DATE:
TITLE:	
BIG IDEA:	
VOCABULARY:	

- Have students put away their learning logs after completing the preview and breakdown strategies—otherwise, students often try to copy what you are writing, instead of paying attention.

OPENING

Teacher: Today, I will model our next comprehension strategy. It's called get the gist of paragraphs. Get the gist helps you to identify the most important information in each paragraph, which is sometimes called the main idea.

Get the gist is used during reading. What other strategy do we use during reading?

Damien: Breakdown.

Teacher: Right, we figure out our unknown words and sentences. Once we understand them, we try to figure out the main idea, or gist, of the paragraph. Getting the gist is important for two reasons. It helps you check whether you really understand what you're reading, and it helps you remember what you're reading.

The first part of the strategy is to remember what happened in the paragraph by retelling it in your own words.

The second part of the strategy has three steps. First, you think about the most important "who" or "what" in the paragraph. Next, you figure out the most important information about the "who" or "what." In the last step, you combine the "who" or "what" with the important information to write a gist of about 10 to 15 words. But this number of words is just a guide. Depending on what you're reading, sometimes you will have more than 15 words, and sometimes you will have fewer than 10 words.

I'll show you how to do each part.

INSTRUCTION

Teacher: Let's reread the first paragraph together.

People can help conserve Earth's natural resources by remembering and practicing the three Rs of conservation: reduce, reuse, and recycle. Reducing, reusing, and recycling can be accomplished in many ways. For example, you can use cloth bags to carry your groceries instead of paper or plastic bags. This practice reduces the amount of plastic and paper bags thrown away.

Teacher: The first part of the strategy is to retell what happened in the paragraph. This paragraph talks about ways to keep from wasting resources. It mentions reducing, reusing, and recycling a lot and even uses an example to demonstrate how reusing cloth bags can help reduce waste of plastic and paper bags.

Put away you learning logs, please. You will use them tomorrow when we do this together, but for today, I will show you how it's done. You can look at my learning log to see what I'm writing.

The next step of get the gist is to figure out the most important "who" or "what" in the paragraph. Because this paragraph isn't about a person, it's not going to be a "who"—it's going to be a "what". It talks a lot about not wasting natural resources. It uses the phrase *conserve Earth's natural resources*, so I think the "what" of this paragraph is *conserving natural resources*. I will write that on the board.

MOST IMPORTANT "WHO" OR "WHAT":

Conserving natural resources

Teacher: The next step of get the gist is to identify the most important information about the "who" or "what." The most important information often tells us what the "who" or the "what" is or does. So, I'm looking for information that tells me about conserving natural resources.

This paragraph tells me that reducing, reusing, and recycling are ways to conserve natural resources. It also says that there are many ways to reduce, reuse, and recycle. It sounds like reducing, reusing, and recycling are important when you try to conserve natural resources, so I will write *many ways to reduce, reuse, and recycle* as my most important information about the "what."

MOST IMPORTANT "WHO" OR "WHAT":

Conserving natural resources

MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

Many ways to reduce, reuse, and recycle

Teacher: It's important to remember that I'm not looking for details. Details are interesting pieces of extra information that help us understand the "who" or "what." But details are not big enough ideas to go in the gist. We want the most important information about the "who" or "what." Details often begin with phrases like *for example* or *in fact*—but not always! This paragraph has a sentence about using cloth grocery bags instead of paper or plastic ones.

[Point to the sentence about cloth grocery bags.]

Simone, what phrase does that sentence start with?

Simone: *For example.*

Teacher: Right! So that gives me a clue that I am about to read a detail. It's interesting and helps me further understand how I can conserve natural resources, but using cloth bags is not the most important idea in the passage, so I will not write it.

Now, I'm ready to write my gist. I remember that it's usually 10 to 15 words but that it's OK if it's a little shorter or longer—as long as it's a complete sentence that tells me the main idea and helps me to remember what I read. I can remember how to write a gist by thinking of a math problem: $1 + 2 = 3$. Step 1, where I identified the most important "who" or "what"; plus Step 2, where I identified the most important information about the "who" or "what"; equals Step 3, which is my gist.

In this case, Step 1 is *Conserving natural resources*. I count that as only one word. Then, I add on Step 2, which is *many ways of reducing, reusing, and recycling*. So, if Step 1 plus Step 2 equals Step 3, my gist is: There are many ways to reduce, reuse and recycle to conserve natural resources. I will write that.

MOST IMPORTANT "WHO" OR "WHAT":

Conserving natural resources

MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

Many ways to reduce, reuse, and recycle

GIST:

There are many ways to reduce, reuse, and recycle to conserve natural resources.

Teacher: Now, I will check how many words my gist includes. Remember that my “who” or “what” counts as only one word, so *conserve natural resources* counts as one word. Now, I will count the rest.

[Count on your fingers.]

Teacher: I count 10 more words, so that makes 11. That’s a good gist because it’s a complete sentence that includes my “who” or “what,” states all the important information, and is between 10 and 15 words.

Before we end class, let’s review what you saw me do today. When do we use get the gist?

Jennifer: After preview?

Teacher: Take a look in my learning log. What did we do right before we did get the gist?

Jennifer: Oh! We figured out words we don’t know.

Damien: We do get the gist during reading, when we’re done reading a paragraph

Teacher: Right. So what did I do first?

Simone: You figured out what the paragraph was about. It was about ways to conserve natural resources.

Teacher: Good. What did I do in next?

Kyle: When are we going to get to do this?

Teacher: In the next lesson. We’ll do it together, but I wanted you to watch me today so that tomorrow, you’ll have an idea of what you’re supposed to do. Can you remember what you’re supposed to do in the next step, Kyle?

Kyle: You write important stuff about the “who” or “what.”

Damien: And you leave out things like examples.

Teacher: Why do you leave out things like examples?

Jennifer: They are interesting, but they’re not really, really important.

Teacher: Excellent. And what’s one way I can tell an example from important information?

- Simone:** It starts with *for example* or *in fact*.
- Teacher:** Is that foolproof?
- Damien:** Yeah.
- Teacher:** Are you sure? Does anyone else have any ideas?
- Jennifer:** Actually, some details might not start with those words.
- Teacher:** You're right. We'll see some paragraphs coming up that have details that aren't so easy to tell right away. What do we do in the last step?
- Kyle:** You write a gist in 10 to 15 words.
- Teacher:** OK, so how do I put my gist together?
- Jennifer:** You use the "who" or the "what" and you add the important information, like that math problem you told us about: $1 + 2 = 3$.
- Simone:** And a good gist is a complete sentence, too.
- Teacher:** We're learning to use this strategy for our science class. Can you think of other classes where you have to find the main idea to understand what you're reading?
- Damien:** We do in reading class.
- Teacher:** Why is it important to find the main idea in reading class?
- Jennifer:** We have to know the main idea, so we can understand what the story is about, like the characters and the plot.
- Teacher:** Right. What about your other classes?
- Kyle:** Sometimes we have to find the main idea in social studies.
- Teacher:** Why do you think it's important to know the main idea in that class?
- Simone:** We have to know it, so we can understand the places and the people that we're learning about.
- Teacher:** Those are some great examples of classes where you have to know the main idea. This strategy can help you find the main idea in any of your classes where you read.

FIELD NOTES

As this was a teacher model, the students primarily listened to and watched me complete a gist for a paragraph. They were not responsible for applying the strategy at this point, just observing. Students seemed attentive and interested in the lesson, following along with the reading. I was careful to keep a steady pace and watch the students' body language for confusion. I was also careful to show students where each step is completed in the learning log.

Some students seemed eager to apply the get the gist strategy to other paragraphs in the reading. I had to remind students that they were only observing and that they would get to try it for themselves in the next lesson.

Students were initially confused as to when the strategy is applied. I showed the students my learning log, which follows the steps sequentially. Students also forgot that details do not always start with clue words that give them away. In future readings, it will be important to provide students with paragraphs that include details that are more difficult to discern. I notified students that future lessons may contain such examples.

TEACHER-SUPPORTED GET THE GIST OF PARAGRAPHS LESSON 9 OUTLINE

OUTCOME

Students learn to find the main idea of short sections of text by using get the gist.

PREPARATION

- Identify a paragraph to use.
 - Prepare the text, cards, and learning logs for students.
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STEP 1: CONDUCT PREVIEW (OPTIONAL; SEE GOAL I)

1. Present the “big ideas.”
2. Preteach important vocabulary.
3. Predict.

STEP 2: CONDUCT BREAKDOWN (OPTIONAL; SEE GOAL II)

1. Read a paragraph or short section of text.
2. Have students mark words and sentences they do not understand.
3. Have students work with a partner, using the Word Fix-Up Strategies card to find the meaning of unknown words and to write the words and brief definitions in their learning logs.
4. Have students work with a partner, using the Get the Gist (Sentences) card to get the gist of one or more confusing sentences.

STEP 3: SUPPORT STUDENTS' USE OF GET THE GIST OF PARAGRAPHS

1. Review the get the gist strategy with students.
2. After reading a paragraph, ask one or more volunteers to retell what the paragraph was about. Provide feedback and ask guiding questions as needed to support the retell. See the Overview and Examples section for question ideas.
3. Use the Get the Gist (Paragraphs) card to work through the rest of the gist strategy. Ask students to provide the most important “who” or “what” and the most important information about it. Then, write the gist in 10 or fewer words. Remind students to use their fingers to come up with the gist.

NOTE: The teacher in the following case study used a word limit of 10 to 15 words, rather than 10 or fewer words. Remember that the purpose of setting a word limit—helping students to omit details and write concise gists—is more important than the exact number of words.

4. Have students record the group gist in their learning logs.
5. For each section or paragraph, repeat steps 2–4.

NEXT STEPS

- Continue group retelling and finding the gist with additional paragraphs.
- When students demonstrate proficiency with retelling and finding the gist in a group, allow them to retell with a partner, create their own gist, and write the gist in their learning log.
- Monitor progress by listening to student retells and evaluating gists students have written in their learning logs. Students usually need a great deal of support and feedback when using this strategy. Make sure that students write gists that capture the main idea of the paragraph.
- When students demonstrate proficiency with the gist strategy for paragraphs, they are ready to learn the after-reading strategies in subsequent lessons.

LESSON 9 CASE STUDY

OBJECTIVE

The teacher assists students in implementing the get the gist strategy for paragraphs.

MATERIALS

- Selected passage
- Learning logs
- Pencils

TIPS

- Allow 5 or 6 minutes for preview (see Goal I), if time permits.
- Have students write only the vocabulary words themselves (not their definitions).
- Have some possible unknown words ready, in case students do not identify any.
- Posting the following information on the board will save preparation time before class.

PAGES:	DATE:
TITLE:	
BIG IDEA:	
VOCABULARY:	
UNKNOWN WORDS:	

- Use the 10 to 15 word limit to help students write concise gists, but do not correct students who produce quality gists that are a little too long. Some students become fixated on having exactly 10 to 15 words and get upset if their gists are longer or shorter.

OPENING

Teacher: Today I will help you get the gist. You will work with a partner to identify the most important “who” or “what” of a paragraph and the most important information about the “who” or “what.” Then, we will write a class gist together.

Briefly use questioning to review when to use the strategy, what the strategy entails, and to watch out for details. Remind students of the $1 + 2 = 3$ trick.

Read the paragraph aloud and have students follow along.

Air takes up space, like all matter. When you blow up a balloon, it gets bigger. This happens because the air you blow into the balloon takes up space. Another property of air is weight. Air presses down on the Earth’s surface all the time. Air pressure is the weight of air as it presses down. You do not feel air pressure because your body is used to it.

INSTRUCTION

Teacher: First, let’s retell what the paragraph is about. What is the paragraph mostly about?

Kyle: It talks about air. It says that when you fill up a balloon, the balloon gets bigger because there’s air in it.

Teacher: OK, so air fills up the space in a balloon. What else is the paragraph about?

Jennifer: *Air pressure is the weight of air as it presses down.*

Teacher: Yes, that’s a sentence in the paragraph. Can you retell that in your own words?

Jennifer: Umm, air presses down on the Earth, but we don’t feel it because we’re used to it.

Teacher: Who can take what Kyle and Jennifer said and retell the whole paragraph?

Damien: When air is in a balloon, the balloon is bigger. Air takes up the space in the balloon. And air pressure presses down on the Earth all the time. We don’t feel it pressing because we’re used to it.

- Teacher:** Who or what is this paragraph about?
- Jennifer:** It's about air pressure.
- Teacher:** Let's see whether the whole paragraph is about air pressure. It says, *Another property of air is weight*, and it defines air pressure as the weight of air as it presses down on Earth. Is the whole paragraph about air pressure, Jennifer?
- Jennifer:** No, not really.
- Teacher:** How do you know it's not just about air pressure?
- Damien:** Because there is a lot in the paragraph that talks about other things, like air.
- Teacher:** Right. So even though *air pressure* is an important word, it isn't what the whole paragraph is about. So, let's look again. What is this paragraph mostly about?
- Simone:** I think it's about air.
- Teacher:** Why do you think it is mostly about air?
- Simone:** Because I see that all of the sentences except one tell about air.
- Teacher:** Right. Let's write that down in our learning logs.
- Teacher:** What important information about air did you find?
- Damien:** Air takes up space. Air has weight, and when it presses down on Earth, it's called air pressure.
- Teacher:** That sounds pretty good. Let's write that in our learning logs. Does anyone else have something different or something to add?
- Kyle:** I wrote down the sentence about the balloon.
- Simone:** I thought that was a detail!
- Teacher:** Simone, why did you think it was a detail?
- Simone:** Because it doesn't really tell you about it, just shows you how it takes up space.
- Teacher:** It's like an example, right? It didn't really add anything to what air is or what it does.

Jennifer: I thought it was a detail, too.

Teacher: You're right; it is a detail. It's an example of how air takes up space. Remember that examples are details. Examples are interesting, but they're extra information, so we don't include them in the gist.

Do you see why it's a detail, Kyle?

Kyle: Because it just shows how air takes up space. The sentence before already told that. I got confused because it didn't start with *for example*, so I thought it was important.

Teacher: That's a good point, Kyle. Examples can be tricky. They often start with clue words like *for example* or *in fact* but not always. It's important to be able to recognize an example when you see it and remember that it's a detail. What else can we add?

Jennifer: Air takes up space.

Teacher: OK, what else?

Damien: Air takes up space and has weight.

Teacher: Is there anything else we can add?

Kyle: The weight is called air pressure when it presses down on Earth.

Teacher: So, let's write our gist. Our "who" or "what" is air, and we have many pieces of important information to put in our gist. Remember, a good gist is a complete sentence and has around 10 to 15 words.

Air takes up space and has weight, and the weight is called air pressure when it presses down on Earth.

Teacher: Hmm, that sentence is a bit long and clunky. How can we improve it? Kyle?

Kyle: Well, it says *weight* twice.

Teacher: OK, I will cross that out. What about the last part, where it says that it presses down on Earth? Do we need all that in the gist?

Jennifer: I don't think it needs the part about Earth. I mean, we already know we're talking about Earth. But all that stuff about pressing down is good because it helps me understand what air pressure is.

Teacher: OK, so I'll cross out the Earth part. Let's see what we have now.

Air takes up space and has weight, and the weight is called air pressure when it presses down on Earth

Teacher: *Air takes up space and has weight, called air pressure when it presses down.* How many words is that?

Jennifer: That's 14 words exactly!

Teacher: Is that a good gist?

Simone: Yes.

Teacher: How can you tell?

Simone: It's a complete sentence, it has the "who" or "what" and important information, and it's between 10 and 15 words.

Teacher: Exactly. Remember $1 + 2 = 3$ to help you put it together. What's the first step, the 1 in our math problem?

Jennifer: The "who" or "what."

Teacher: And what's Step 2?

Damien: Important information.

Teacher: Right, so if add Step 1 to Step 2, what do we get?

Simone: A gist.

Kyle: Step 3.

Teacher: You're both correct. Step 3 is the gist, made up of the "who" or "what," plus the important information from steps 1 and 2.

FIELD NOTES

Students seemed eager to apply the strategies today. This particular group does well working with partners, but as other groups do not, I might have to teach as a whole group at some point.

The example paragraph was easy enough for the students to figure out. Some students picked *air pressure* as the “who” or “what.” I explained that the paragraph was actually about air. Students seemed to understand the difference once it was explained to them. It’s important to help students see the paragraph as a whole.

Looking back, one strategy I could have used to further illustrate how to find the “who” or “what” is to look for words that appear frequently. Although this strategy does not work all of the time, it can be an effective tool. If used, it is important to point out to students that this strategy does not always work. In this case, the word *air* appears seven times in the short paragraph, so the strategy would have been helpful.

One student thought a detail was important information. Students are taught that examples are details and to look for examples by clue words such as *for example* or *in fact*. I used this opportunity to point out that not all examples begin with clue words. The students seemed to understand why the example qualified as a detail once I explained.

Writing a gist as a whole class also seemed to work well. Students provided their information, I synthesized the information into a gist, and then I questioned students to determine whether it was a good gist. The students were able to remember the steps of get the gist and what constitutes a good gist.

GET THE GIST OF PARAGRAPHS

1. What is the most important “who” or “what?”
2. What is the most important idea about the “who” or “what?”
3. Write the gist in 10 or fewer words in your learning log.

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