

ELA Writing: CCR-Based Formative Assessments

Target Standard: ELA Writing Anchor Standard #2: Write Informative/Explanatory Texts . . .

Activity Level: Students are currently functioning roughly at Level B on that anchor standard

Instructional Context: The students are learning to introduce a topic and group related ideas about it together in writing. Specifically the instructor is preparing them to write brief (2-3 sentence) summaries of paragraphs that they have read and discussed.

The instructor began this unit by defining summarization as restating the most important information in as few of their own words as possible, and then asking students why they might need to summarize. They gave examples such as summarizing a work incident for the boss or explaining complicated things to their kids. Usually their summarizing is oral, so the instructor describes how summarizing is important in college when you write papers that include ideas and information you've read somewhere else. When the instructor asks what kind of things students would want to read about and summarize for their kids, they mention things in the news, such as what they're hearing about terrorism coming to this country because of refugees. They say they would like to know more about what is really going on because their kids are hearing scary things. The instructor suggests that they work on summarizing information about refugees and starts collecting newspaper articles and editorials that are written at a level that looks like it will be challenging but not too difficult for the students to handle.

At the same time, and to support their ability to write their summaries, the instructor is working with students on sentence combining. The instructor has been providing direct instruction and practice opportunities in how to combine two simple sentences into one compound sentence using either 1) coordinating conjunctions or 2) semicolons.

The individual paragraphs that students will summarize are part of the longer texts that the instructor has collected; once students have been able to effectively summarize several of the paragraphs, the instructor's longer-term goal is to help students move to level C on the Anchor standard, at which point they will be able to do more complex writing: to introduce a topic and group more extensive related ideas from multiple paragraphs or sections. In other words, they will eventually move to summarizing a multi-paragraph text such as a full editorial.

Formative Assessment #1: Exit Ticket

Purpose: 1) to assess student understanding of the content of the text, and 2) to evaluate students' skill in using coordinating conjunctions and semicolons to combine simple sentences into compound sentences

Process: After reading and discussion of a paragraph, the instructor asks each student to make one short statement about the paragraph they have been discussing. The statement can be about what the paragraph says, or about what the student is thinking about it. As students respond the instructor writes each statement on the board/chart paper.

After all students have responded, the instructor hands out index cards and says, “Now, before you leave today I want you to choose any two of these statements and combine them into one sentence, two different ways. Write your 2 combined sentences on your index card, sign it, and hand the card in to me as you leave.”

Next Step: Based on the results of the activity – what gets written on the index cards – the instructor should be able to decide whether or not any significant review of the text discussion or the sentence combining lesson is needed in the next class.

Formative Assessment #2: Work Review Checklist

Purpose: 1) to assess students’ understanding of the elements of an accurate summary of a brief text, and 2) to evaluate students’ skill in summarizing a brief text

Process: After the instructor has provided direct instruction in summarizing a paragraph (explanation, modeling) and the instructor and students together have tried out writing a summary of a paragraph that they had read and discussed, the instructor says “in our next class I want you to write a summary of the next paragraph in 2 or 3 sentences. And at least one of your sentences needs to be a compound sentence. But before we do that we are going to put together a guide for what to look for in a good summary. You can use the guide to help you when you write your summary, and we will also use it when we review your summaries to see how you did. So think about what you have been learning about summarizing, and tell me what you think makes a good, clear, accurate summary.”

The instructor writes down their ideas on the board and reads through the results out loud. The list of ideas should include things like “states the main point that the writer is making”, “includes the most important details that support the main point”, and “doesn’t include any unnecessary information” as well as, in this particular case, “has 2 or 3 complete sentences” and “includes a correct compound sentence.” The instructor goes over the list and adds anything important that is missing. After class, the instructor puts the information into the form of a simple checklist.

After they’ve completed their summaries with the guidance of the checklist, they review the list to self-assess their work. The instructor then meets briefly with each student individually to review the work and have the student talk about their self-assessment. Then the instructor uses the checklist to provide descriptive feedback on the summary, noting agreement with the student’s self-assessment when possible.

Next Step: Both the development and the use of the checklist should give instructors and students a lot of information regarding what students have learned about summarizing brief chunks of text. Therefore the instructor can decide where more direct instruction or review might be needed; or the instructor might feel confident that students are ready to move on to slightly more complex summarizing (responding to a longer chunk of text? Introducing complex sentences? Etc.).