

University of Oum El-Bouaghi

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Department of English

READING TEXTS

A course elaborated for the first semester of second year LMD classes' requirements

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Content:

- 1. Making inferences**
- 2. Summarizing**
- 3. Paraphrasing**
- 4. Responding to a text**

1. Making Inferences

When we infer or make inference, we logically deduce (logical deduction) something that is not explicitly stated in the text. We rely on our prior knowledge and what we read to understand what hasn't been said openly in the text.

People's inferences might be quite different depending on each one's perspective or their cultural and social environment.

e.g.: Susan helped James to dress up for the party.

From the sentence above, we can infer that (a) Susan and James are married, or (b) Susan is James' mother.

Do not confuse 'inferencing' with 'guessing' and 'predicting'. The concepts are too close in meaning, yet different.

When you infer, you combine what you already know or what is commonly known with what you have read in a logical way to understand something that needs to be understood or that the author wants you understand without mentioning it in the text. Inferences require evidence from the text to be explained (justified), while guesses are somewhat personal and meant to help the reader understand better and/or faster.

Inferencing Questions Examples:

- 1- What inference does the author want you to make from the sentence/paragraph? Support your answer with textual evidence.
- 2- In the sentence/paragraph, the author writes the word '.....'. Use the evidence from the text to explain what the word refers to.
- 3- What inference can you make about what will occur by the end of the paragraph/chapter? Explain how the text helps you to draw this conclusion.

Exercise:

Read the passage and then respond to the questions. Each question will ask you to make a logical inference based on textual details. Explain your answer by referencing the text.

Every day after work Paul took his muddy boots off on the steps of the front porch. Alice would have a fit if the boots made it so far as the welcome mat. He then took off his dusty overalls and threw them into a plastic garbage bag; Alice left a new garbage bag tied to the porch railing for him every morning. On his way in the house, he dropped the garbage bag off at the washing machine and went straight up the stairs to the shower as he was instructed. He would eat dinner with her after he was "presentable," as Alice had often said.

1. What type of job does Paul do?
How do you know this?
2. Describe Alice:
What in the text supports your description?
3. What relationship do Paul and Alice have?
Why do you feel this way?

N.B: Use Inferences Worksheet for more practice.

2. Summarizing

Summarizing means giving a concise overview of a text's main points in your own words; the process of this skill can be related to the process of *Skimming*: When you skim you only read the main points in the text i.e. title, thesis statement, and topic sentences in order to get the gist of the text. When you summarize, you return back this gist (what the text is about) in your own words to the reader.

A summary is always much shorter than the original text because it contains only the *main idea(s)* and the *key points*.

* The Main Idea is what the text or paragraph is about. It is generally found in the thesis statement and topic sentences.

* The key points are arguments or information that supports the main idea. They may be elaborated with *supporting details*; yet, only the main idea and the key points should appear in the summary and NOT the *supporting details*.

Hint:

Always ask yourself: **Do I need this information to understand the text?**

If the answer is 'yes', put it into your summary in your own words

Writing a summary does not involve criticizing or analyzing the content of the text. Your summary should not contain:

- * **Opinions;**
- * **Background knowledge;**
- * **Personal information.**

How to Summarize?

1. Read carefully the text.
2. Don't let big words scare you.
3. Ask: What is this text about?

Your answer...

A. If the text is a paragraph:

1. Should be a complete sentence or two.
2. Should be in your own words.
3. Should cover the main idea and key points.
4. Shouldn't be a word or two.

B. If the text is an essay:

1. Should be a complete paragraph.
2. Should be in your own words.
3. Should cover the main idea and key points.
4. Shouldn't be a sentence or two.

Some mathematics:

A four-paragraph essay would typically be summarized in a paragraph of 4 to 6 sentences. Each sentence would express the main idea of one of the paragraphs and one or two sentences to cover the key points if necessary.

Example Text:

A penny for your thoughts

If it's a 1943 copper penny, it could be worth as much as fifty thousand dollars. In 1943, most pennies were made out of steel since copper was needed for World War II, so, the 1943 copper penny is ultra-rare. Another rarity is the 1955 double die penny. These pennies were mistakenly double stamped, so they have overlapping dates and letters. If it's uncirculated, it'd easily fetch \$25,000 at an auction. Now that's a pretty penny.

Incorrect example response 01:

This text is about pennies.

- This response is too short.
- It does not include key ideas.

Incorrect example response 02:

The 1943 copper penny is worth a lot of money. Copper was hard to get during the war so there aren't many of them. The 1955 double die penny is worth a lot too. These pennies were stamped twice on accident.

- Too much unnecessary stuff.
- Main idea is not clear.

Correct example response:

This text is about two very rare and valuable pennies: the 1943 copper penny and the 1955 double die penny.

- Includes key information.
- Doesn't include unnecessary information
- Is a complete sentence.

3. Paraphrasing

When you paraphrase a sentence or a paragraph, you restate the author's ideas in your own words. That is, you only keep the meaning and you change the way (vocabulary, structure, style and grammar) in which the ideas have been written. However, you need to keep the author's key terms and use many words from your own. You can also use in-text citation with reference to the author (name and date if from a published source).

Paraphrasing is a very important skill in the academic context. It is usually used in writing research papers, response journals and examination...etc. It is also used in standard tests such as TOEFL, IELTS and TOEIC.

A paraphrase can be slightly shorter or longer or of the same length as the original text depending on the author's and the paraphrases style.

How to paraphrase?

Method 01: Use different vocabulary with the same meaning.

This means use synonyms instead of the original words. However, you need to make sure that the synonyms you use do fit 100% the context of the sentence to avoid creating unnatural sentences.

Look at this example:

Original : "It can be difficult to choose a suitable place to study English."

Paraphrase 1: "It is often a challenge to pick up (x) a relevant (x) school to learn English."

Paraphrase 2: "It is sometimes hard to select an appropriate place to learn English."

The verbs *pick-up* and *select* are synonyms of *choose*. Yet, *select* fits the context of the sentence better. Similarly, *relevant* and *appropriate* are synonyms of *suitable*, however, *appropriate* fits the context better. Paraphrase 1 is unnatural and expresses a wrong version of the original sentence.

Method 02: Change the word order.

It is not always easy to decide which words to move or to decide to which position the words should be moved. When you move a word you might need to change some other words, add some other words or cut some other words to ensure that the new sentence is grammatically correct.

Look at these examples:

a. If the original sentence has two or more clauses, change the order of the clauses.

1. "If they have some help, most people can paraphrase effectively. However, practice is important because paraphrasing is difficult."
2. "Most people can paraphrase effectively, if they have some help. Paraphrasing is difficult, however, so practice is important."

b. If the original sentence has an adjective and noun, change the adjective into a relative clause.

1. "Writing essays can be a challenging task."
2. "Writing essays can be a task which is challenging."

Method 02: Use different grammar.

Changing the grammar of a sentence is not something easy, however, in terms of paraphrasing; it is safer than changing vocabulary because the meaning remains clear for the reader even if you commit grammatical mistakes.

Here are two suggestions for how to change the grammar without making errors:

a. Change some of the words in the original sentence into different parts of speech (you will often need to change the word order and some other words, too).

1. "The most effective way to build your English skill is to study regularly."
2. "The most effective way of building your English skill is to do studying on a regular basis."

b. If the original sentence is in the active voice, change it to passive or vice versa.

1. "To improve English, you should learn new vocabulary on a daily basis."
2. "To improve English, new vocabulary should be learned on a daily basis"

4. Responding to a text

A text response is a style of writing in which you share your reaction to something. It is an opportunity to let the audience know how you feel about something. It is also referred to as a reader response which is a specific response to a specific text.

A text response by definition is specifically a response to a book you have read but it can also be a response to a film you have watched, a game you have been playing, or for more mature students it could be a response to a decision the government is making that affects you or your community that you have read from a newspaper or website.

How to respond to a text?

When writing a response it is important that you get the following points across to your audience.

- How do you feel about what you are reading / saw / heard?
- Relate the issue to your personal life (views, emotions, attitudes ...etc), or to any other issue related to it.
- What do you agree or disagree with?
- Evaluate the examples the author gives. Are they relevant, or enough?
- Can you identify yourself with the situation?
- Add your own examples, facts, statistics, or authority to show why you agree or disagree with what the author says.
- What would be the best way to evaluate the story?
- Discuss the causes and the effects of the issue. See if there are other causes/effects or other types of relations the author did not include.

Respond to the reading with your own commentary: express your opinion about the book and any arguments or conclusions you believes are present in the text.

What to consider?

- Emotions* – Why does the section or the whole book resonate with you?
- Characters* – Who is involved? Why is he/she involved?
- Language* – What do you notice about the choice of words? What literary tools does the author use to enhance the section and how does it affect the story, characters, scene, etc?
- What else do you find interesting? What are you confused about? What don't you like?

Objectives: Why do we need to respond to a text?

Writing a text response bridges the gap between the receptive (passive) and the productive (active) skills of the language as it helps students:

- (1) Develop high-level writing skill.
- (2) Refine their critical thinking skill.
- (3) Promote their ability to express their thoughts in writing.
- (4) Engage in reading as an active rather than a passive activity.

Response Journal Design

To succeed in developing an effective story response, the below listed questions help the reader to achieve this objective.

Nb. The students' responses to following questions require evidence from the text

1. Describe the main character(s) in the story. How are they similar or different?
2. What do you predict will happen next in the story? What information from the text helped you make that prediction?
3. What is the main problem in the story? If you know, how was the problem solved?
4. What lesson is the author teaching us in the story? Explain using details from the story.
5. Is there anything you would change about the story? Explain what you would change and why?
6. Would you recommend the story to someone? Why or why not?
7. What word best describes the main character(s)? What does the character do or say that makes you choose that word?
8. What illustrations in the story help you understand what is happening in the story? Explain using details from the story.
9. How is the main character in this story similar and/or different to a character in another story you have read?
10. What is the theme of the story? What other stories have you read with a similar theme?

11. Describe three character traits that a character has in the story. Provide evidence from the story to prove your response.

12. Explain why the setting is important to the story. Could the story take place somewhere else? How would the story be changed if the setting was different?

A Response Journal Sheet (Student's Sample)

	Entries	Details (examples)
1	Date of reading:	From September 10 th to November 2 nd , 2022
2	Title: Author: Date and place of publication: Publisher:	Martin Eden Jack London 1909, San Francisco California (USA) Macmillan
3	Author's biography:	Jack London had a wild youth on the water front of San Francisco, his native city. Born in.....
4	Major works:	The Call of the Wild - the Sea Wolf - The White Fence - The Game
5	Genre:	Fable -Fairy Tale - Fantasy - Mystery - Science Fiction...etc
6	Major themes:	Socialism Vs Individualism Appearances are misleading Solitude is often the best society.....etc
7	Settings:	Place and time: Oakland at the beginning of the 20 th Century
8	Characters:	Martin Eden: a young sailor from a working class background who falls in love with the bourgeois Ruth and educates himself to become a famous writer. Ruth Morse:
9	The summary:	What the story is about without retelling it. Different actions are presented in chronological order.
10	The response:	See section above
11	Extracts	Incorporate one or two well selected quotes to justify your comments (key moment, important event, funny incident...etc)