

This document provides a summary of Recommendation 3c from the WWC practice guide Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4-9. Full reference is on the last page.

CONTENT: **Reading**
GRADE LEVEL(S): **4–9**
LEVEL OF EVIDENCE: **Strong**

Recommendation

Teach students a routine for determining the gist of a short section of text.

Cognitive science has confirmed that much of what we remember is not specific details but instead the overall “gist” of an event or idea. When reading a text, it is not often the exact wording we hope students will remember and incorporate into their own knowledge base. Our goal is for students to extract the “main idea” and to learn how to separate what is important in a passage from parts that are not.

How to carry out the recommendation

1. Model how to use a routine to generate gist statements.

Instructional strategies from the examples

- Provide a step-by-step process for finding the “gist” in a passage. Model this process for students.
- Collect gist statements created by students as a result of using the step-by-step process.

South Carolina standards alignment

ELA: RL.MC.6, RI.MC.6

TEACHER: INST.TH.1, INST.TH.2, INST.PS.1

Routinize the process of finding the “gist” in a passage by breaking it into smaller, manageable steps. Resource 3C.1 shows an example routine to support student discovery of the gist. Many routines begin with a search for the subject of passage – “Who or what is this section about?” Encourage students to look for clues such as frequently repeated words and within the titles, headers, or diagrams/pictures.

Teach students a routine for determining the gist of a short section of text

Resource 3C.2 explains the process of marking the text when searching for important information in the passage. Model the use of the routine across multiple text types. Consider keeping track of gist statements as students work through the text.

Resource 3C.1. Routine for generating a gist statement

1. Identify and mark the most important person (referred to as the *who*), place, or thing (referred to as the *what*) in a section of text.
2. Mark and then list the important information about the most important person, place, or thing.
3. Synthesize or piece together the important information to formulate a gist statement.
4. Write the gist statement in your own words.
5. Check that the gist statement includes all the important information in a short, complete sentence that makes sense.

Resource 3C.2. Marking the text

In this practice guide, the panel recommends marking words or phrases that students do not understand or cannot read. The panel also recommends marking important information in the text, so it is easy to find and refer back to. Marking can be done by circling, underlining, highlighting, or any other method a teacher prefers. Choose any method for marking. Ensure that one method is used for difficult words or phrases and a different one is used for important information. Use the same methods consistently in all lessons. When students use electronic texts, the platforms may allow for consistently marking the text.

At first teachers can mark the text for students to see. Students can mark their text as the class works together. Over time, the responsibility of marking the text can shift to students, so they can learn to mark text when they are reading independently.

2. Teach students how to use text structures to generate gist statements.

Instructional strategies from the examples

- Explicitly teach text structure: cause and effect, problem and solution, and compare and contrast. Model how to determine the use of the structure across multiple paragraphs in a text.
- Teach students to use one perspective of text structure to help them write their gist statement.

South Carolina standards alignment

ELA: RL.MC.6, RI.MC.6

TEACHER: INST.TH.1, INST.TH.2, INST.PS.1

Teach students a routine for determining the gist of a short section of text

The organization of text can provide helpful clues toward creating the gist of a passage. Text structures such as cause and effect, problem and solution, and compare and contrast are listed in Resource 3C.3. Explicitly introduce each text structure one at a time and model how to determine which structure is in use across multiple paragraphs within a passage. Support students in seeing the commonalities among the structures as well. For example, cause and effect can be confused with problem and solution. Suggest students pick one perspective on the text structure to stick with and use as the basis for their gist statement. When no text structure is evident, support students in using the routine outlined in Resource 3C.1.

Resource 3C.3. Types of text structures and the related questions that help identify the gist

Problem/solution text structures are used to describe a problem and how it was solved.

Question: *What is the problem? What is the solution?*

Cause/effect text structures are used to explain how one thing or event led to or caused another thing or event to happen.

Question: *What happened? What happened as a result?*

Compare/contrast text structures are used to explain how topics are alike or different.

Question: *How are the topics the same? How are they different?*

Teach students a routine for determining the gist of a short section of text

Example 3C.2. Teacher modeling how to use a text's structure to generate a gist statement for a group of students

Before reading, the teacher briefly explains where Wuhan, China is located on a map and the meaning of the words *virus* and *global pandemic*. The teacher stops once while reading to rephrase a sentence, replacing the word *vaccine* with "medicine that protects you from getting too sick."

COVID-19: A Dangerous Virus

In December 2019, a **virus** identified as COVID-19 began to spread from the Wuhan province in China. By March 2020, COVID-19 had caused a global pandemic, which means the **virus** had spread to all parts of the world. The COVID-19 **virus** is dangerous because it attacks the cells in the lungs, and it is easy to catch. By February 2021, half a million people in the United States had died from the **virus**.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, health care professionals strongly advised us to change the way we live. They asked that **people wear face masks** and stay at least six feet away from other people in public places. They also recommended that people **stay home** to control the number of people who would get sick from the **virus**. Instead of going to their local school, students across the United States **went to school online**. **Several drug companies quickly developed vaccines** that could be used to protect people from the COVID-19 **virus**. With effective vaccines, the number of people catching the COVID-19 **virus** will get lower and lower, and people will be able to live more normally.

After reading the short section of text aloud, the teacher gives the students the following explanation.

Teacher: *I think this section of text has a problem-solution text structure. The problem is the virus and all the sickness and death it is causing.*

The teacher circles the word *virus*.

Teacher: *I know the virus is a problem because it says here that it has spread to all parts of the world, that it is easy to catch, that it attacks the lungs, and that many people have died from the virus. The COVID-19 virus was in almost every sentence. Next, I ask myself, what is the solution? In this case, there were many solutions. People changed the way they lived by wearing masks, staying home, and attending school online.*

The teacher highlights the three solutions.

Teacher: *The development of the vaccine to prevent people from getting the virus is also a solution. I know that because it says here that the vaccines will make it so that fewer people get sick from the virus.*

The teacher reminds students that figuring out the type of text structure can help them to write a gist statement. The teacher reminds students that the problem is who or what the passage is about, and the solution is the most important information about the person, place, or thing. Next, the teacher shows students how to develop the gist using the text structure.

The teacher writes "The problem is the COVID-19 virus, and one solution is the vaccine" on the board.

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Example 3C.2. Teacher modeling how to use a text's structure to generate a gist statement for a group of students (continued)

Most important information:

1. The COVID-19 virus was very dangerous, and many people died.
2. Health professionals said we should wear masks and stay away from other people to stop people from spreading the COVID-19 virus.
3. Drug companies developed COVID-19 vaccines to help protect people.

The teacher formulates the following gist statements and writes them on the board.

Possible gists:

1. We changed our lives to stop spreading the COVID-19 virus, but vaccines will help us live more normally.
2. The COVID-19 virus made people sick, but vaccines will keep people safe.

Teacher: *Now I need to reread my gist statement to see if it makes sense. Did I identify the who or what this section is about? Yes, the what or the problem is the COVID-19 virus. Did I identify the most important information about the COVID-19 which is the solution? Yes. The most important information about the COVID-19 virus is that vaccines were developed, which is the solution. The solution is the vaccines, which will bring us back to normal. Did I write this in my own words and not copy them directly from the text? Yes. I don't see sentences exactly like mine.*

3. Work collaboratively with students to generate gist statements.

Instructional strategies from the examples

- Collaborate with students to write their own gist statement.
- Have students explain their thinking for how they wrote the gist statement. Reduce the level of support as students become more proficient in writing gist statements on their own.

South Carolina standards alignment

ELA: RL.MC.6, RI.MC.6

TEACHER: INST.TH.1, INST.TH.2, INST.PS.1

After providing modeled examples of generating a gist statement, collaborate with students and prompt them through the routine. Encourage students to explain their decisions as they progress through the routine and to connect their thinking to the relevant portions of the text. As the gist statement develops, keep track of it on the board and have students record it in their logs. As students become more proficient with the process, gradually reduce the level of prompting and support.

Teach students a routine for determining the gist of a short section of text

Resources 3C.3 demonstrates how to work with a group of students to identify the gist of a section of text.

Example 3C.3. Teacher and students collaboratively generating a gist statement

Before reading, the teacher briefly develops students' knowledge of genetics and DNA by showing a short video clip. The teacher explains the meaning of *genes* and *traits* in the context of the passage. The students share traits they have in common with their parents or siblings.

Genes play an important role in determining how you look and other traits you have that have been passed to you from your parents. Your genes include instructions that tell your cells to create certain traits or characteristics, such as whether you have curly or straight hair or how you smile. These instructions are called deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). Each of your biological parents passes on half of their genes. That means that half the instructions in your body come from your biological mother and half from your biological father. Each gene has a special job, and the instructions or DNA tell your genes what to do. Because you share some of the same instructions in your genes as your parents, the instructions in your body will tell your genes to create some traits that are like your parents' traits, and you can end up looking like your parents. Your brothers and sisters who have the same biological parents may also have some traits like your parents.

The small group of students reads the text together. The teacher stops the reading briefly to clarify the meaning of *biological*. The teacher reviews the steps of the routine in [Resource 3C.1](#) for generating gist statements.

Teacher: *Let's generate a gist statement together. What is the first step?*

Students: *We need to figure out who or what this is about.*

Teacher: *Right. Who or what do you think this passage is about?*

Jordan: *Families looking alike!*

Sammy: *I think it is about genes.*

Teacher: *So, it looks like we have two different thoughts about who or what this passage is about. Let's talk about this. Why do you think it is families looking alike, Jordan?*

Jordan: *I think so because it says families look alike because they share the same genes.*

Sammy: *But it's talking about genes too. We read that genes make our traits.*

Teacher: *Let's read what it says. The first sentence says, "Genes play an important role in determining how you look and other traits you have that have been passed to you from your parents."*

The teacher highlights the sentence with these two ideas.

Teacher: *What does it seem like this sentence is about?*

Lupe: *Genes.*

Teacher: *Let's continue with the next sentence: "Your genes include instructions that tell your cells to create certain traits or characteristics such as whether you have curly or straight hair or how you smile." What are they talking about here?*

Jordan: *Traits*

Teacher: *We have to decide what it is mainly about.*

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Example 3C.3. Teacher and students collaboratively generating a gist statement (continued)

Sammy: *It says that genes are how traits are passed on, and everything we read talks about traits. So, I agree, it is about genes.*

The teacher circles all the places *genes* and *traits* appear.

Teacher: *It mainly talks about genes, but sometimes it is hard to figure out what the passage is about. But for now, do you all agree that this passage is about genes or how traits are passed on? Turn and talk to your partner and decide if you agree or disagree.*

Students talk to their partner briefly and then the teacher asks them to raise their hands if they agreed. All the students raise their hands.

Teacher: *So, this section mentioned that half of our parent's DNA is passed on to us. If you are talking about things that are passed on that are characteristics, what do you suppose they are talking about here?*

Jordan: *They might be talking about a child having the same hair as their dad.*

Teacher: *Yes, they talked about genes and DNA, so they could be talking about characteristics you see. How can we put that all together?*

No response.

Teacher: *Children inherit many things. What can we call them?*

Aria: *Traits.*

Teacher: *Let's put that all together. The main "what" is...?*

Aria: *Genes?*

Teacher: *What do they do? Let's list the most important information about them.*

The teacher elicits responses from students, highlights the important information in the text, and writes it on the board.

1. Traits are passed on.
2. Our genes have instructions called DNA, which tell our body to develop certain traits or characteristics.
3. Half of each parent's DNA is passed to their child.

After this, the teacher lists all of the important information. The teacher then synthesizes the information to tell what this paragraph is about.

Teacher: *What is all of this important information telling us?*

Jordan: *Genes and traits we get from our parents.*

The teacher tells students to work with a partner to generate gist statements. The teacher reminds students to check that their gist statement includes the most important information and is a short complete sentence that makes sense. Afterward, students share the following gists:

1. Genes play a part in how children get traits from their parents.
2. Genes include instructions for traits passed on from parents to children.
3. Genes include DNA that makes traits that are passed down in families.

Teach students a routine for determining the gist of a short section of text

Potential roadblocks and how to address them

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<i>My students are having a really hard time generating gist statements. What can I do?</i>	Break the process into smaller steps focusing first on the ‘who’ and ‘what’ of the text. Ask students to work in pairs and consider creating a few possible examples of gist statements for text and having students identify which would be the best match to the text.
<i>Students get tired of doing gist statements day after day.</i>	Use the creation of gist statements as just one of the many tools that encourage comprehension. Vary the instructional activity regularly to avoid fatigue on gist generation.
<i>I am not sure what text to use with students when teaching them how to generate the gist.</i>	Gist statements can be generated from all types of text. Have students use their subject-area textbooks or required readings as the text and seek out text that includes relatable material.
<i>Sometimes, I think my students have finally learned how to generate gist statements. But then, a few days later, we get to a new piece of reading material, and it all falls apart. Will they ever learn how to do it?</i>	As text becomes more difficult and complex, generating a gist statement can become more difficult. For more challenging texts, focus on increasing your use of prompts, referencing the routine, and including additional encouragement or positive feedback on their progress.
<i>I seem to spend too much time talking at my students when we work on gist statements.</i>	As students begin to demonstrate greater proficiency with generating gist statements, gradually pull back your use of prompts and scaffolding. Encourage students to continue providing justification for their gist statements from the text and ask follow-up questions when students appear stuck.

Reference: Vaughn, S., Gersten, R., Dimino, J., Taylor, M. J., Newman-Gonchar, R., Krowka, S., Kieffer, M. J., McKeown, M., Reed, D., Sanchez, M., St. Martin, K., Wexler, J., Morgan, S., Yañez, A., & Jayanthi, M. (2022). *Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4–9* (WWC 2022007). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://whatworks.ed.gov/>.