

SOS SPOTLIGHT ON STRATEGIES

Simple instructional strategies that incorporate digital media in meaningful, effective, and practical ways.

WHITTLE IT DOWN



Summarizing is an important comprehension strategy which involves more than retelling content. In order to summarize effectively, students must have a solid understanding of the presented material (reading passages, videos, audio files, etc.) in order to synthesize large chunks of information into generalizations. The Whittle It Down strategy is designed to scaffold summarization by having students work independently, then collaboratively as part of a small group, and finally as a whole class to 'whittle down' a list of vocabulary words that are most important to understanding the topic being studied. This final list is then used to compose a summary of the topic.



Materials: media (video or audio), paper and pencil, chart paper and markers or dry erase board and markers

1. Explain to students that as they review the selected resource, they will need to determine five words that are significant to understanding the concept.
2. Share the digital resource with students. You may want to pause every 60 seconds to allow students to take notes.
3. Provide three minutes for students to work independently to generate a list of five words that relate to, or are important to, explaining the topic.
4. When their lists are complete, allow students to move into small groups to share their words and use evidence-based reasoning. Students should refer to what they saw, heard, or read to justify their selection. Each group will select one student to record the shared terms on chart paper.
5. After each member of the small group has shared, the group must work together to whittle down their list to the three most important words.
6. Have one representative from each group share out their final three words to the whole class.
7. Display word lists on chart paper, dry erase board, or in a digital format.
8. Individual students will select a minimum of three words from the class list as a foundation to write a reflective summary of the topic.

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Here is an example of what students might generate after watching a video on ocean pollution.

- Individual students write down five words they learned from the video that relate to or are important in explaining the topic.
- Groups of students discuss and negotiate to whittle the list down to the three most important words.
- Groups share out and words are recorded publically.
- Individual students select a minimum of three words to use in a summary statement.

My words	Group Words
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• gyre• plastic• sewer• food chain• Animals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• plastic• chemical• toxin
Whole Class Words <div><div>gyre toxin plastic chemical food chain biohazard</div><div>whales blubber banned nature contaminated</div></div>	
My summary statement: Pollution in the ocean is caused by chemicals and toxins that humans have not taken care of the right way. It ends up in the oceans and is harmful to whales and other sea life.	



This strategy can be used in a variety of ways:

1. an activator to pique student interest and increase engagement
2. a focused and structured brainstorm
3. a formative assessment to gauge prior knowledge
4. a structure for helping students summarize new material