

A Legal Beagle's Guide to Precision Writing

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Subject / Lesson: Social Studies

Grade Level: 9th-12th grade(s)

Overview/Description: Summarizing, paraphrasing, and purposeful writing are developmental skills that serve a student throughout their academic and professional careers.

Duration: 1-2 class periods.

Standard: Social Studies Literacy Skills for the Twenty-First Century: Analyze and evaluate evidence, arguments, claims, and beliefs.

Objective: TSWBAT develop precision writing skills by summarizing, paraphrasing, and transforming (editing) dense text into simple, understandable, precise statements.

Materials and Resources:

- Dense excerpt provided by the teacher
- Dictionaries and Thesauruses
- Markers, post it notes, paper, etc.
- Computer Lab
- Rubric

Instruction/Demonstration/Procedures:

This lesson will serve as a mechanism to expose students to the principles of precision writing. The teacher will model the activity for the class using think aloud strategies. Students and the teacher will engage in precision writing strategies as a whole group. Students working in small groups will engage in the precision writing strategy.

The steps for the precision writing activity are as follows:

1. The teacher will provide students with a passage of dense text.
2. The teacher will model summarization and paraphrasing strategies that reduce dense text into more easily understandable, precise statements (Please refer to the linked articles for more information).
3. The teacher will model the use of thesauruses and dictionaries in the summarization and paraphrasing phase.
4. The teacher will introduce students to the notion of peer review and editing strategies.

5. The teacher will introduce students to the rubric guidelines and encourage students to self-assess their work.
6. The teacher will direct students to use digital technology to create a final draft.

Links with Background Information:

- <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/9856/ab6dc6bbe522b3f87aadd30fd5fa09864b3c.pdf>
- <https://www.dailywritingtips.com/10-techniques-for-more-precise-writing/>

Assessments/Evaluation: Please refer to the following rubric.

<https://cuacs8.mck.ncsu.edu/ncpublicschools/accountability/testing/writing/ContRubric.html>

Suggestion for Review or Closure: This activity can be used at various times throughout the course to enable students to develop precision writing skills.

Example from Machiavelli's The Prince

(Dense Excerpt)

Concerning Cruelty and Clemency, and Whether it is Better to be Loved than Feared

Upon this a question arises: whether it is better to be loved than feared or feared than loved? It may be answered that one should wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person, it is much safer to be feared than loved, when, of the two, either must be dispensed with. Because this is to be asserted in general of men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, covetous, and as long as you succeed they are yours entirely; they will offer you their blood, property, life, and children, as is said above, when the need is far distant; but when it approaches they turn against you. And that prince who, relying entirely on their promises, has neglected other precautions, is ruined; because friendships that are obtained by payments, and not by nobility or greatness of mind, may indeed be earned, but they are not secured, and in time of need cannot be relied upon; and men have less scruple in offending one who is beloved than one who is feared, for love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserved you by a dread of punishment which never fails.

Nevertheless a prince ought to inspire fear in such a way that, if he does not win love, he avoids hatred; because he can endure very well being feared whilst he is not hated, which will always be as long as he abstains from the property of his citizens and subjects and from their women.

(Edited Excerpt)

Is Better to be Loved or Feared?

Consider this question: As a government official, is it better to be feared or loved? You could say both, but, that is difficult to do. If you can't choose both, it is better to be feared. Men are selfish, weak, and fake. As long as you bring success they are loyal to you. They will offer you their property, life, and even their children. But when you don't bring success, they will quickly turn against you. And that official is ruined. Friendships obtained by agreements are weak. People are quick to turn on those they love rather than those they fear, because the consequence of punishment is stronger with someone you fear than someone you love.

A government official should inspire the right amount of intimidation so if he isn't loved, he isn't hated either. This is easy, as long as he doesn't steal his people's property.

Other potential texts could include:

Federalist Papers

Hammurabi's Code

Declaration of Independence

Constitution of the United States

Gettysburg Address

A Vindication of the Rights of Women

The Social Contract

Any text book

Scientific or technical excerpts

Legal documents

Content Rubric

Points	Description
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic/subject is clear, though it may or may not be explicitly stated • Maintains focus on topic/subject throughout the response • Organizational structure establishes relationships between and among ideas and/or events • Consists of a logical progression of ideas and/or events and is unified and complete • Support and elaboration are related to and supportive of the topic/subject • Consists of specific, developed details • Exhibits skillful use of vocabulary that is precise and purposeful • Demonstrates skillful use of sentence fluency
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic/subject is generally clear, though it may or may not be explicitly stated • May exhibit minor lapses in focus on topic/subject • Organizational structure establishes relationships between and among ideas and/or events, although minor lapses may be present • Consists of a logical progression of ideas and/or events and is reasonably complete, although minor lapses may be present • Support and elaboration may have minor weaknesses in relatedness to and support of the topic/subject • Consists of some specific details • Exhibits reasonable use of vocabulary that is precise and purposeful • Demonstrates reasonable use of sentence fluency
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic/subject may be vague • May lose or may exhibit major lapses in focus on topic/subject • Organizational structure may establish little relationship between and among ideas and/or events • May have major lapses in the logical progression of ideas and/or events and is minimally complete • Support and elaboration may have major weaknesses in relatedness to and support of the topic/subject • Consists of general and/or undeveloped details, which may be presented in a list-like fashion • Exhibits minimal use of vocabulary that is precise and purposeful • Demonstrates minimal use of sentence fluency
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic/subject is unclear or confusing • May fail to establish focus on topic/subject • Organizational structure may not establish connection between and among ideas and/or events • May consist of ideas and/or events that are presented in a random fashion and is incomplete or confusing • Support and elaboration attempts to support the topic/subject but may be unrelated or confusing • Consists of sparse details • Lacks use of vocabulary that is precise and purposeful • May not demonstrate sentence fluency
NS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This code may be used for compositions that are entirely illegible or otherwise unscorable: blank responses, responses written in a foreign language, restatements of the prompt, and responses that are off-topic or incoherent.

