

CAT 3: The One-Sentence Summary (Assesses Skill in Synthesis & Creative Thinking)

**Estimated levels of time/energy required to prepare, to respond (students), and to analyze:
MEDIUM**

Description: Students answer a prompt in a single informative, grammatical, and long summary sentence. (**Who did what to/for whom, when, where, how, and why?** = WDWWWWHW)

Purpose: This allows instructors to find out to what extent students can summarize a large amount of information on a given topic concisely, completely, and creatively. It also gives students practice in using a technique for chunking information – condensing it into smaller, interrelated bits that are more easily processed and recalled.

Procedure:

- 1) Select an important topic or work that your students have recently studied in your course, which you expect them to learn to summarize.
- 2) Working as quickly as **you** can (as the instructor), answer the question in the Description in relation to that topic. Note how long this first step takes you.
- 3) Next, turn your answers into a grammatical sentence that follows the WDWWWWHW pattern. Note how long this second step takes you.
- 4) Allow your students approximately twice as much time as it took you to carry out the task.
- 5) Prepare the question to be display-ready by writing it on the board, a transparency, or digitally projected. They could also be written on a half-sheet of paper and distributed to the students. It is important the prompts are presented in writing. Do not only read the question(s).
- 6) Hand out index cards or half-sheets of paper. It is best if students do not write their names, unless there is a very good reason to know who wrote which comments.
- 7) Explain the time limit, appropriate format of answers, and when they will receive feedback. Two to five minutes is usually enough time. Responses range from words or phrases to short sentences.

Examples:

Course: Immunology (Biology/Medicine) **Lecture:** AIDS

After an initial lecture and reading assignment on AIDS, the instructor gave the students five minutes to write a One-Sentence Summary explaining how HIV infects and affects the immune system.

Course: Physics for Technicians

After covering the process of generating electricity by converting fluid energy to mechanical energy, the instructor had the students write a One-Sentence Summary. They were asked to summarize the hydroelectric power generation process in one sentence.

Adaptations/Extensions:

- 1) Turn the summaries into two- or three-sentence summaries.
- 2) Have students work in pairs to critique and improve each other's summary, either before handing them in or after getting them back.

Suggestions: Responding to students' feedback may take longer than planning because questions lead to other questions. Set clear time limits. To temper expectations and disappointment, let students know you will not comment on everything. If **you** cannot easily summarize the topic in one sentence, do not ask your students to do it.

References and Resources:

Berthoff, A. E. (1982). *Forming/thinking/writing: The composing imagination*. Upper Montclair, N.H.: Boynton Cook. Note: Berthoff labeled the technique HDWDWW – How Does Who Do What and Why?