

# ***The Not So Quick Way***

## **Part I: Background information**

**Lesson title:** The Quick Way to Find and Write the Main Idea of a Newspaper Article

**Course:** ESL 52A (An Introduction to Reading and Vocabulary Building)

**Authors and Semester:** The authors were Vicki Blaho and Matthew Kline, and the lesson was created and piloted in the Fall 2007 semester.

**Rationale:** One of the authors of this lesson was the teacher of this class, and one activity that the students in the class did throughout the semester was to choose a newspaper article, read it, and then summarize the main idea of the article in one sentence. The instructor stated that the students consistently struggled to find the main ideas and articulate in one sentence the main ideas of the articles. The authors of this lesson hoped that the use of an essential question and quick thinks would help students learn how to find and summarize the main idea of a newspaper article in one sentence.

An essential question is a question formulated by an instructor that encapsulates the essential aspect or idea aspects of a particular lesson. The instructor shows the essential question to students at the beginning of the lesson, but the students are not supposed to answer the question until after the lesson since it queries them on information that they will learn during the lesson. Essential questions are very useful pedagogical tools because they force instructors to think about what they really need to focus on in a lesson and because they help students anticipate what they are going to learn.

Another pedagogical tool that this lesson utilized is the quick think. Essential questions are overarching, whereas quick thinks are given at the end of a section or portion of a lesson. A quick think is usually one or two questions that require students to use information or procedures learned in a section of a lesson. Quick thinks break up lessons into vignettes of approximately 15 to 20 minutes so that students are asked to cognitively engage with material covered in the vignettes.

**Abstract:** This lesson attempted to help students learn how to quickly determine the main idea of a newspaper article and then summarize the main idea in one sentence that begins “This article is about...” The students were able to summarize the articles after the lesson, but the lesson showed to the authors of the lesson that it did not show students how to find the main idea of the article quickly. The lesson was given at night during a regular class session. The participants were beginning level ESL students. Although the nationalities of the students were diverse, most of the students were from either Latin America or East Asia.

## **Part II: The Lesson**

**Learning Goals:** Students will learn how to quickly find the main idea of a newspaper article and will be able to summarize the main idea in one sentence.

**The Essential Question:** Imagine you’re in 52B next semester and the teacher gives you a 2-page Los Angeles Times article to read and summarize in one

sentence in class. You don't have a lot of time. What are the best steps to take to write a main idea statement?

**Phase 1:** The instructor connected the current lesson with the students' past learning experiences by stating how they were going to learn how to get a higher score on their newspaper article reports, and she showed them a copy of the "News Report" grade form. The instructor had the students read the essential question, which had been written on the board prior to the class starting. The students were told they would be able to answer the essential question at the end of the lesson.

**Phase 2 (Presentation):** The instructor showed students on an overhead projector a short news article entitled "Making Every Step Count," which was taken from the New York Times blog. The instructor circled the title and the caption of the photo while telling them that this would help them get the main idea. Afterwards, the students were told that they needed to figure out the main idea of each paragraph in the article and write a short phrase describing the main idea of the paragraphs next to the paragraphs. The main ideas of each paragraph were termed "quick points". The students read the article and then told the instructor what they thought each quick point was for the paragraphs. The instructor and the students agreed on the correct quick points and the instructor wrote them on the overhead next to their corresponding paragraphs. Finally, the instructor and the students added up the quick points and determined together the main idea of the article. To complete this section of the lesson, the students were shown on the overhead Quick Think 1. Students choose the

answers by themselves and then shared their answers with a partner.

Afterwards, the entire class discussed the answers to Quick Think 1.

The next section of the lesson dealt with formulating one sentence that gave the main idea of the article. The instructor wrote on the board a sentence that was the main idea while telling the students that the sentence should contain the main points of the article. The students were then told that it is best to use your own words as much as possible instead of copying words from the article. The instructor elicited from the students synonyms of words in the sentence and changed the sentence to those words. As a wrap-up to this section of the lesson, the instructor gave the students on the overhead projector Quick Think 2. The students answered it by themselves, and then the teacher went over the answer with the class.

**Phase 3 (Independent Practice):** Students were given a copy of an article taken from the Los Angeles Times entitled “Laughter Helps Blood Go with the Flow”. The students were given time to use the steps they had learned in Phase 1 to come up with the main idea of the article and create one sentence that stated the main idea. The teacher circulated around the room and gave students help as needed.

Once the students were finished, several volunteers wrote their main idea sentences on the board and the teacher and the class determined whether the main idea statements were acceptable.

### **Part III: Results and Recommendations**

**Results:** The essential question and the use of quick thinks worked well for this lesson. The essential question did what it was supposed to. It engaged the students cognitively by requiring them to focus on the key element of the lesson. In addition, it helped us, the developers of the lesson, to be more consciously aware of the learning goals and whether aspects of the lesson were relevant to the learning goals. The quick thinks also engaged the students and reduced the amount of time that the lesson was teacher-centered.

The lesson took much longer than we had expected. It took almost one hour to complete. This was mainly the result of it taking a long time for students to determine the main idea of each paragraph in the article that they read for independent practice. Further, it seemed that some of the students did not need to decide what the main idea of each paragraph was in order to come up with a sentence that summarized the entire article. These students determined the main idea of the article by considering the title, subtitle, caption under the picture, and finding the main idea of the first two paragraphs. However, it was observed that one student created a main idea statement that included an idea that was a minor point in the article because it was the main idea of only one paragraph. This student would have benefited by actually adding up the main ideas of the paragraphs because he would have realized that the point was a small, secondary aspect of the article. Further, after the lesson, students told the instructor that they thought the lesson was very beneficial. It really helped them figure out the main idea of the article, and it helped them state the main idea of the article in one sentence.

**Recommendations:**

The first recommendation is to keep the essential question and quick thinks. As mentioned earlier, they were very beneficial to the lesson. Second, if the lesson continues to require students to find the main idea of each paragraph and add them up to determine the main idea of the entire article, then the instructor should note that he/she is not teaching the students how to quickly find the main idea. If the instructor wants to show the students how to more quickly determine the main idea, then he/she should simply tell the students to focus on the title, subtitles, captions of pictures, and the first two paragraphs of the article. If, on the other hand, an instructor wants to thoroughly teach students how to find the main idea of an article and summarize it in one sentence, then this lesson might be very useful.

# Appendix

## News Report Grade Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ (1 – 5 each = 25 max pts.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Interesting article?

\_\_\_\_\_ Used own words?

\_\_\_\_\_ Time used wisely?

\_\_\_\_\_ Important info. only?

\_\_\_\_\_ One sentence intro. of the main idea

New York Times Blog Article

NOVEMBER 11, 2008  
**Making Every Step Count**



caption

Wearing a pedometer helped this exerciser lose 60 pounds during a weight loss study in 2005. (Matt Stone for The New York Times)

- ① Looking for a simple way to improve your health? Consider the lowly pedometer. *Point? improve health*
- ② The gadget, worn at the waist, counts every step of the wearer. As it turns out, that's a surprisingly effective way to persuade people to move more, according to a new report in The Journal of the American Medical Association. *Points move more*
- ③ In a review of more than two dozen studies, researchers at Stanford University found that people who used pedometers to monitor their daily activity walked about 2,000 more steps every day, or about one extra mile, compared to those who weren't counting steps. People who used pedometers also showed statistically meaningful drops in body mass index and blood pressure. *better counting steps Point? health*
- ④ The authors of the JAMA article noted that while pedometers do seem to promote an increase in physical activity, there's no follow-up data showing whether the health benefits lasted after the pedometer studies ended. *Point? health*
- ⑤ Once pedometers were used primarily to map distances during exercise. Now health experts are advising people to wear the devices daily in order to monitor all their steps, including the most routine ones, like those taken while walking to the car. National fitness programs encourage people to take at least 10,000 steps a day. *Point? counting steps*
- ⑥ Pedometers can cost from \$5 to \$55, and it's worth checking to make sure the one you select is counting accurately. A University of Tennessee study comparing 13 brands found that some pedometers tallied every step twice, while others missed one out of every four steps. Some models may even count bumps in the road while the wearer is sitting in a car. *Point? pedometer miscount*
- ⑦ Research shows that pedometers often are less sensitive when a person walks slowly. In one study, researchers at the University of Colorado put 257 men and women of various ages and sizes on treadmills while wearing pedometers. The gadgets missed more than one out of three steps when the pace was slower than two miles an hour. But accuracy increased to 96 percent when the walkers picked up the pace to three miles an hour. *Point? accuracy of pedometer*
- ⑧ It's easy to check the accuracy of a pedometer. Just walk 100 steps while wearing one, and check to see whether your count matches the device. *Point? accuracy*

### **Quick Think 1**

Choose all the best steps to find the main idea of an article.

- a. circle the title
- b. look up difficult words in the dictionary
- c. write the Quick Point of each paragraph
- d. read the whole article carefully
- e. circle caption(s) on photos
- f. read the 1<sup>st</sup> and/or 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraphs
- g. underline everything that looks important

### **Quick Think 2**

True or False?

A main idea statement must include all the major points of the article.

# Laughter helps blood go with the flow

LAT 4/4/05

Watching a funny movie appears to improve vessel function, which can cut the risk of heart disease.

By ROB STEIN  
Washington Post

1 According to the Bible, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine." Now, modern science may be validating that Old Testament proverb — a good laugh may actually help fend off heart attacks and strokes.

2 "We believe laughing is good for your health," said Michael Miller, of the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore, who led the research. "And we think we have evidence to show why that's the case."

3 A growing body of other evidence has suggested that negative emotions, particularly depression and stress, can be harmful, making people more prone to illness, more likely to experience suffering from their ailments and less likely to recover as quickly, or at all.

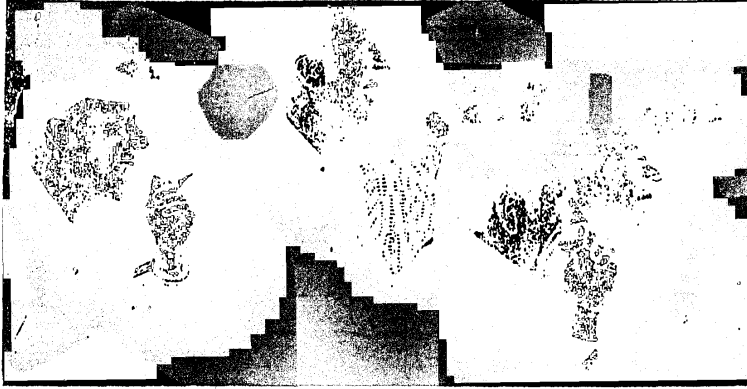
4 So they decided to examine the ability of blood vessels to expand — known as vasodilation. Poor vasodilation can increase the risk of heart attacks and strokes by making the passageways prone to being blocked, cutting off vital blood flow.

5 The researchers asked 20 healthy men and women to watch clips of two movies — either the violent opening battle scene in the 1990 film "Saving Private Ryan" or a humorous scene from a comedy, such as the 1996 feature "Kingpin."

6 The researchers tested the subjects' vasodilation, before and after the movie, by constricting and releasing an artery in their arms with a blood pressure cuff and then using ultrasound to measure how the blood vessels were functioning.

7 Overall, blood flow decreased by about 35% after experiencing stress but increased 22% after laughter — an improvement equivalent to that produced by a 15- to 30-minute workout.

8 "It was a pretty dramatic difference," Miller said.



LORI SHEPLER Los Angeles Times

HEARTY CHUCKLES: A recent study finds that laughter helps increase blood flow, and researchers are looking into how such positive emotions can affect health

9 Miller and his colleagues hypothesize that laughter may have a contrasting effect, causing the body to release other natural chemicals known as endorphins — pleasure-producing agents best known for producing the "runner's high" — that may counteract the effects of stress hormones and cause blood vessels to dilate.

10 "Conceivably, when you laugh you send a signal to the brain to release these endorphins, and these may activate receptors to release other chemicals, perhaps including nitric oxide, which is known to enhance blood vessel dilation," Miller said.

11 Laughter may also use similar mechanisms to help boost the immune system and reduce the amount of inflammation in the body, which has been linked to an increased risk of a host of health problems, said Lee Berk, an associate professor of health promotion and education who studies laughter at Loma Linda University in California.

12 "Laughter is not dissimilar from exercise," Berk said. "It's not going to cure someone from stage three cancer, but in terms of prevention it does make sense. In a sense, we have our own apothecary on our shoulders. Positive emotions such as laughter affect your biology."

"In terms of prevention [laughter] does make sense."

— LEE BERK  
Associate professor of health promotion and education at Loma Linda University

## POINTS

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