Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment in Task-Based Online Course Design

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Background

- Center for Advanced Proficiency in English: One of the original Language Training Centers funded by DLNSEO / U.S. Department of Defense starting in 2013

- Purpose: Provide online instruction in professional-level writing skills for non-native speakers of English who are DoD personnel

- Phase 1: Advanced Professional Writing in English 1, a 10-week online course in general professional writing

- Phase 2: APWE 2, Professional Summary Writing, piloted in 2016-2017

- CAPE originally based at UMBC, now at GMU

Advanced Professional Writing in English 2

- **Format:**
  - Fully online course provided on the GMU BlackBoard learning management system
  - 10 hours of class work per week
- **Focus:** Training in summary writing for professional purposes
- **Eligibility:** DoD personnel who had completed APWE 1

Learning Objectives

Participants who complete all course activities will be able to

- Create summaries that align with the expectations of the federal workplace using one or more source texts

- Identify the main idea of each source text and the writer's purpose for writing and perspective on the topic

- Understand and use paraphrasing, summarizing, and synthesizing techniques

- Use guidelines to structure their summary writing, and use a rubric to evaluate and continue to improve their summary writing skills

Instructional Design

- Task based: Focused on summary writing

- Learner / learning focused: Dialogue education, understanding by design

  - Jane Vella, *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach*. Jossey-Bass, 1994.

  - J. Vella, P. Berardinelli, & J. Burrow, *How Do They Know They Know.* Jossey-Bass, 1998.

  - G. Wiggins & J. McTighe, *Understanding by Design* (2nd ed.). Pearson, 2005.

- All course materials, activities, and exercises are posted and available throughout the course. Participants can go back and review or re-do exercises and tasks whenever they wish. They can also work ahead if they wish.

- Course participants know from the beginning what they will learn to do and how they will know that they have learned to do it.

Instructional Design, *cont.*

- All course work is assessed by instructors and by participants themselves using a descriptive rubric. Self-assessment and peer assessment are fundamental parts of the instructional design.

- Instructors and participants work together through a series of tasks and exercises that lead up to a final project. Along the way, participants evaluate their work on each task using the rubric. The instructor uses the same rubric to provide feedback, so participants always know how they are being evaluated.

- The final project takes place in the final week of the course. It is outlined for participants at the beginning of the course, so they know what their goal is.

- This approach gives participants responsibility for their own learning while in the course, and tools that enable them to continue learning on their own after the course ends.

Challenges with the Instructional Design

- Fully online, asynchronous course: Essential to establish and maintain instructor presence

- Participants' questions about value of assessing their own work

- Participants' questions about value of peer review

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Frequently Asked Question #1:
Why Evaluate My Own Writing?

- The hallmark of a strong writer is the ability to review and edit one's own written work.

- Using the Summary Evaluation Rubric to evaluate your writing throughout the course will help you develop this ability.

- Consistently reviewing your writing in relation to an external standard will make you a stronger writer over time.

Frequently Asked Question #2:
Why Work in a Peer Group?

- When you write, you write for an audience. Working with peers can help you develop your sense of how your writing might appear to your audience.

- Reviewing your peers' writing can also help you understand how readers connect with a writer's work.

- You may gain ideas from your peers about ways of approaching summary writing that you had not thought of yourself.

Summary Evaluation Rubric

Element Types

- Content
- Organization
- Language
- Synthesis
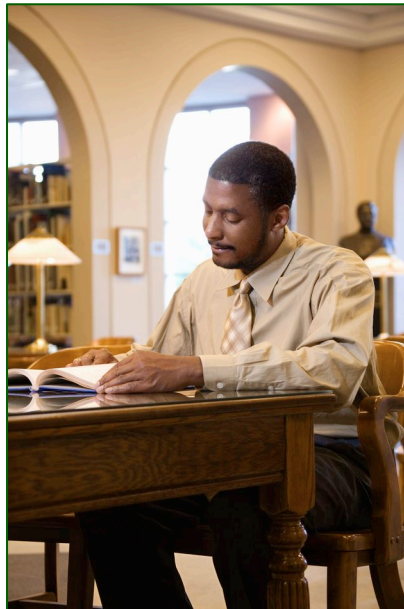
Levels

- Experienced
- Capable
- Developing
- Emerging

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Content in a Summary

A strong summary provides the following information about the source document(s):

- Purpose and perspective: What is the author's purpose for writing? What is the author's perspective or bias?

- Main idea: What is the author's central point? What main thing does the author want the reader to know, understand, or do?

- Support: How does the author support the main idea? What are the supporting ideas or arguments?

In addition, a strong summary is objective: It does not include the perspective or opinion of the summary writer.

Summary Evaluation Rubric: Content

Element	Experienced	Capable	Developing	Emerging
Purpose/perspective	The purpose of each source document is identified correctly and stated clearly and accurately.	The purpose of each source document is identified correctly and stated in broad terms.	The purpose of each source document is identified but not clearly stated.	The purpose of each source document is not identified correctly or is not stated at all.
Main focus or idea	The main idea of each source document is identified correctly and stated clearly and accurately.	The main idea of each source document is identified correctly and stated in broad terms.	The main idea of each source document is not clearly stated, or another idea is identified as the main idea.	A supporting idea is identified as the main idea, or the main idea is not identified at all.
Support	All key supporting ideas from each source document are identified correctly and stated clearly and accurately.	Most key supporting ideas from each source are identified correctly; most are stated clearly and accurately.	Some supporting ideas are identified correctly; some less important details are identified as supporting ideas.	Key supporting ideas are not identified or not stated; only minor ideas are identified as key supporting ideas.
Objectivity	The summary includes only information from the source document(s).	The summary includes mostly information from the source document(s), but may also contain a reference to the summary writer's perspective.	The summary mixes information from the source document(s) with several references to the summary writer's opinion or perspective.	The summary focuses mainly on the summary writer's opinion or perspective.

Organization of a Summary

A strong summary uses three principles to organize information about the source document(s):

- Opening: The summary begins with a statement of the source's purpose and main idea, following the BLUF (Bottom Line Up Front) principle

- Sequence: The summary organizes material so that each supporting idea is presented clearly and succinctly

- Length: The summary contains only essential information

This way of organizing material in a summary meets the expectations of readers from Western cultures in general, and military contexts in particular.

Summary Evaluation Rubric: Organization

Element	Experienced	Capable	Developing	Emerging
Opening	The summary opens with a clear, concise, accurate statement of each source document's purpose and main idea.	The opening statement is mostly focused on the purpose and main idea of each source document, but may also contain other material.	The summary opens with a statement that does not reference the purpose or main idea of the source document(s).	The summary does not have a clear opening statement.
Sequence of material	The summary presents supporting ideas according to a clear, consistent organizing principle that helps the reader follow the sequence.	The summary has an organizing principle, but uses it inconsistently or in ways that may confuse the reader.	The summary switches among different organizing principles and provides little direction for the reader.	The summary does not present supporting ideas according to any clear organizing principle. Writing lacks a sense of direction or seems random.
Length	The summary includes only the most essential information. It is short and quickly read.	The summary includes essential information and some additional material. It is a little longer than it needs to be.	The summary contains much extraneous material and is much longer than it needs to be.	The summary is as long as, or longer than, the source document.

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Language in a Summary

A strong summary uses language effectively to communicate with the reader.

- Paraphrasing and vocabulary: The summary expresses the author's meaning in original words and conveys meaning clearly through precise vocabulary

- Style, tone, and voice: The summary is written in a professional style that is appropriate for the readers

- Cohesion and coherence: The summary uses linking words and structures to show connections among ideas

- Sentence structure, grammar, mechanics: The summary uses language correctly

Summary Evaluation Rubric: Language

Element	Experienced	Capable	Developing	Emerging
Paraphrasing and vocabulary (choices and usage)	The summary contains all original writing and strong vocabulary choices that convey meaning precisely.	The summary contains mostly original writing and good vocabulary choices. It may have occasional echoes of the source document(s).	Many sentences in the summary contain incomplete paraphrases of the source document(s). Vocabulary is not precise; some words are used incorrectly.	The summary contains full sentences copied directly from the source document(s). Vocabulary is limited and words are often used incorrectly.
Style, tone, and voice	Style and voice are professional. Tone is appropriate for the audience.	Style and voice are mostly professional. Tone is mostly appropriate for the audience.	Voice varies between professional and casual. Style includes occasional idioms/slang expressions. Tone is not always appropriate for a professional readership.	Voice is overly casual or personal. Style uses many idiomatic expressions and second person address ("you"). Tone is not appropriate for a professional readership.
Cohesion and coherence	The summary links ideas with cohesive devices that guide the reader . It has clear overall coherence of ideas and structure.	The summary sometimes uses cohesive devices to link ideas and guide the reader. It has some features of overall coherence.	The summary uses few cohesive devices or uses them inappropriately. It has little overall coherence and may be confusing to the reader.	The summary is a string of sentences with no internal cohesion or overall coherence. The reader must re-read and interpret to achieve understanding.
Sentence structure, grammar, and mechanics (punctuation, spelling)	All sentences are clear and complete. The summary contains no errors in grammar or mechanics.	Most sentences are clear and complete. The summary contains very few errors in grammar or mechanics.	Several sentences are unclear or incomplete. The summary contains many grammar and mechanics errors that distract the reader.	Most or all sentences are incomplete. Errors in grammar and mechanics prevent the reader from understanding the meaning.

Synthesis

A strong summary of two or more sources represents each source fully and equally.

- It presents the content of each source accurately

- It is not biased toward one source over others

- It makes clear which information comes from which source

Element	Experienced	Capable	Developing	Emerging
Synthesis	The summary synthesizes the sources clearly. It credits each original source correctly and appropriately balances the sources' content without bias.	The summary represents and credits all sources, but may not be consistent in crediting them clearly and correctly. There may be some imbalance in the representation of the sources.	The summary does not fully represent the source documents or credit them correctly. The summary may favor one source document over the other(s).	The summary omits or falsely represents a source, or fails to credit original sources properly, or is obviously biased toward one source.

Challenges with the Rubric

- Purpose and perspective: These need to be separated from one another.
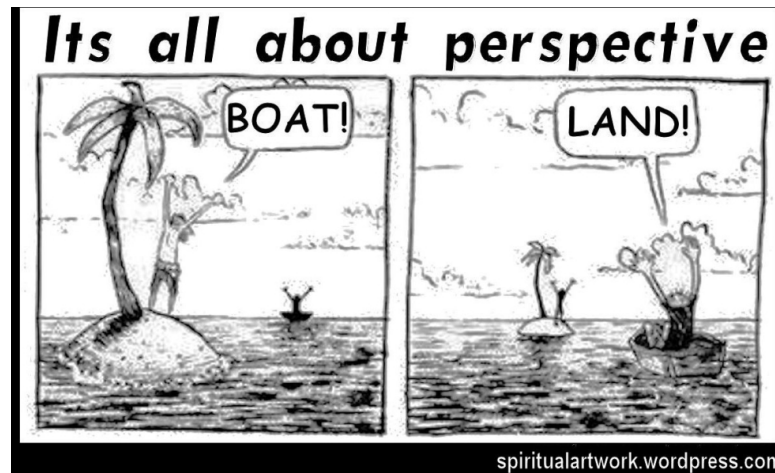
- Length: Too short is as much of a problem as too long.

- Assigning levels appropriately

Course Content and Sequence

Course topics are sequenced so that participants build the skills they need to complete the final project. The final project is a synthesis summary that draws on two articles.

- Orientation Week, Module 1: Navigating the online learning system; understanding and using a rubric

- Week 1, Module 2: The content of a strong summary: purpose and perspective, main and supporting ideas, objectivity

- Week 2, Module 3: Organization of a strong summary: opening, sequence of information, length

- Week 3, Module 4: Language use in a strong summary: paraphrasing and vocabulary, style and tone, cohesion and coherence, sentence structure and grammar

- Week 4, Module 5: Synthesizing from multiple sources in a strong summary

- Week 5, Module 6: Review and final project

Orientation Week, Module 1

Required activities:

- Complete and submit the Entry Assessment

- Review resource materials on one or more aspects of summary writing.

- Analyze two summaries using the Summary Evaluation Rubric. Submit the analysis as an assignment.

- Answer questions about the analysis on the discussion board, and post replies to the responses of at least two peers.

- Post to the individual Learning Progress Log.

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Modules 2-5

Required activities:

- Review resource materials on one or more aspects of summary writing.

- Analyze a summary using the Summary Evaluation Rubric. Submit the analysis as an assignment.

- Answer questions about the analysis on the discussion board, and post replies to the responses of at least two peers.

- Read one or two source documents and write a summary, using provided guidelines. Analyze the summary and submit the summary and analysis as an assignment.

- Answer questions about the summary on the discussion board, and post replies to the responses of at least two peers.

- Post to the individual Learning Progress Log.

Module 6

The focus of Module 6 is completion of the final project. Required activities:

- Read two source documents and write a synthesis summary. Analyze the summary and submit the summary and analysis as an assignment. This assignment is the final project for the course.

- Post to the individual Learning Progress Log.

- Complete the Exit Assessment.

Challenges with Content and Sequence

- The amount of material was more than some participants could manage in 10 hours per week.

- Importance of teaching reading skills.

- Insufficient time allotted to developing synthesizing skills.

Course Materials

Materials for summarizing were drawn from general interest publications and from materials developed for advanced English learners in military contexts.

- Charles Boyle & Simon Mellor-Clarke, *Campaign: English for the Military* (Macmillan, 2006)

- The Washington *Post*

- Time Magazine

- Other online resources

Course Materials, *cont.*

- Each module except Module 6 had an instructor-developed PowerPoint that explained the main ideas of that module, supplemented with appropriate resource readings found online.

- Sample summaries were developed by CAL for use in the summary evaluation activities.

- Supplementary materials included instructor-developed illustrations of the process for mapping an article's content to create a summary, and optional exercises on specific topics such as use of cohesive devices.

Challenges with Course Materials

- Needed articles that were relevant and interesting, but not too relevant.

- Some articles worked better than others for summarizing.

- More article-mapping illustrations and strong summary examples are needed.

- Teaching materials must be developed specifically for the course – few appropriate resources available.

Entry and Exit Assessment

- Entry: Read an article and write a summary of it. Summary rated by CAL raters using the Summary Evaluation Rubric.

- Exit: Read the same article and write a summary of it. Summary rated by CAL raters using the Summary Evaluation Rubric.

- Module 6 Learning Progress Log: Compare entry summary with exit summary and answer questions about self-perceptions of improvement.

  - Increased understanding of what constitutes an effective summary

  - Increased awareness of own strengths and ongoing needs as a writer

Self-Assessment at Entry and Exit

- The most important element I feel confident with is the main idea. Now I read the article looking for what is the author trying to say as a whole not the detail.

- The first couple of times I wrote my summaries, I missed the author's perspective. I tried to incorporate the author's perspective on my exit assessment.

- In the entry assessment I did not identify the main idea while in the exit assessment I summarized the main idea in the first sentence. I think my ability to write effective summaries have increased greatly. Now I read the article and write in my own words what the document wants to convey.

- My skills related to these elements improved because now I can write a summary that opens with a clear, concise, and accurate statement of the article instead of leaving part of the main idea until the end of the summary.

- I asked myself what was the bottom line of his message, aside from the details. I have improved by choosing more specific words. I still need to improve my BLUF sentence writing skill.

Self-Assessment at Entry and Exit

- I was not even aware of BLUF in the beginning. I learned BLUF in the course, and I found it very helpful and efficient in writing summaries. I will continue using this technique in the future.

- I believe now I'm able to write summaries and other documents using stronger vocabulary. Module 4 help me a lot to improve my skills. I do recognize I can improve the structure of my sentences.

- I still need to practice writing a summary that contains all original writing and strong vocabulary choices that convey the exact meaning.

- I still need to work on writing my summary from my own words and not take words or phrases from the original writing. I have to choose strong vocabulary and phrases that convey the exact meaning.

- I paraphrase much better now. The course helped me to differentiate between weak and strong paraphrasing. This is one part that I needed to improve, and I did.

Self-Assessment at Entry and Exit

- Using strong vocabulary was another challenge because I was afraid of changing the text or the meaning, but with guidance from the course instructors I learned how to select better stronger vocabulary without changing the meaning.

- Another improvement to my writing was using more cohesive tools to make my sentences adhere and flow smoothly together. This was brought to my attention by one of the instructors during one of the modules and sure enough I noticed this pattern in my writing, and I think now I am better in this aspect.

- I felt much more ready to tackle the exit assessment. Upon reading the article, I wrote down the purpose, main idea, and supporting evidence. I was able to write the summary and check the organization and language use. I did use the full hour, but I felt that I understood the process. I feel that I've learned a tremendous amount about the technical aspects of summarizing and synthesizing that I know I will continue to use.

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Numeric Outcomes: Content

Part.	PURPOSE / PERSP.		MAIN IDEA		SUPPORT		OBJECTIVITY		ENTRY AVG	EXIT AVG	AVG CHANGE
	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY	EXIT			
1	3	1	3	2	3	2	4	2	3.25	1.75	-1.50
2	2	2	3	2	2	2	4	3	2.75	2.25	-0.50
3	4	4	3	3	3	3	4	3	3.50	3.25	-0.25
4	1	2	2	3	2	2	3	4	2.00	2.75	0.75
5	1	3	2	4	2	3	3	4	2.00	3.50	1.50
6	1	3	1	3	2	3	3	3	1.75	3.00	1.25
7	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1.00	1.50	0.50
8	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	3.25	3.25	0.00
9	2	3	2	2	2	2	3	4	2.25	2.75	0.50
10	2	2	2	3	2	3	3	4	2.25	3.00	0.75
11	4	3	4	3	3	3	4	4	3.75	3.25	-0.50
12	3	2	3	2	2	3	4	3	3.00	2.50	-0.50
13	2	1	2	1	2	1	3	2	2.25	1.25	-1.00
14	2	3	2	3	2	2	4	4	2.50	3.00	0.50
15	3	2	3	2	3	3	3	4	3.00	2.75	–0.25
16	2	2	2	3	2	3	3	4	2.25	3.00	0.75
17	1	2	2	3	2	3	3	3	2.00	2.75	0.75
18	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4	2.00	2.50	0.50

10 increased − avg increase 0.78
1 stayed the same
7 decreased − avg decrease -0.64

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Numeric Outcomes: Organization

Part.	OPENING		SEQUENCE		LENGTH		AVG ENTRY	AVG EXIT	AVG CHANGE
	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY	EXIT			
1	2	2	3	3	4	3	3.00	2.67	-0.33
2	2	2	3	3	3	2	2.67	2.33	-0.33
3	3	4	4	4	4	4	3.67	4.00	0.33
4	2	2	3	3	2	3	2.33	2.67	0.33
5	1	4	3	3	3	2	2.33	3.00	0.67
6	2	3	3	3	2	3	2.33	3.00	0.67
7	1	2	1	3	2	3	1.33	2.67	1.33
8	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.00	3.00	0.00
9	2	3	3	3	3	3	2.67	3.00	0.33
10	2	3	3	3	3	3	2.67	3.00	0.33
11	3	3	3	4	3	2	3.00	3.00	0.00
12	3	2	3	3	3	3	3.00	2.67	-0.33
13	2	2	2	2	3	1	2.33	1.67	-0.67
14	2	3	3	3	3	3	2.67	3.00	0.33
15	3	2	4	3	3	3	3.33	2.67	-0.67
16	1	3	2	3	3	3	2.00	3.00	1.00
17	2	3	3	3	3	3	2.67	3.00	0.33
18	1	2	3	3	3	3	2.33	2.67	0.33

11 increased – avg increase 0.55
2 stayed the same
5 decreased – avg decrease -0.47

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Numeric Outcomes: Language

Part.	PARA / VOCAB		STYLE /TONE		COHESION		STRUCT / GRAMMAR		ENTRY AVG	EXIT AVG	AVG CHANGE
	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY	EXIT	ENTRY	EXIT			
1	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	2.50	2.00	-0.50
2	2	2	4	2	3	3	2	2	2.75	2.25	-0.50
3	3	3	3	4	4	4	3	4	3.25	3.75	0.50
4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3.00	3.25	0.25
5	3	3	3	4	2	3	2	3	2.50	3.25	0.75
6	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	4	2.00	3.25	1.25
7	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	1.25	2.00	0.75
8	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2.75	3.00	0.25
9	2	3	3	3	3	3	1	2	2.25	2.75	0.50
10	2	3	2	3	3	3	2	3	2.25	3.00	0.75
11	3	3	4	3	3	4	3	4	3.25	3.50	0.25
12	2	2	3	2	3	3	2	2	2.50	2.25	-0.25
13	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	3	2.25	2.25	0.00
14	2	2	3	3	3	2	3	3	2.75	2.50	-0.25
15	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.00	3.00	0.00
16	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	2	2.00	2.75	0.75
17	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	2.50	3.00	0.50
18	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	2.00	2.50	0.50

12 increased − avg increase 0.58
4 stayed the same
4 decreased − avg decrease -0.38

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Thank You!

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