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"Are Cats Good? An Important Study": Using a Meme Article for Teaching Writing of Analytic Summaries

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Overview

This activity is designed as part of the major project "Annotated Bibliography" in a first-year writing course. At the time the activity is implemented, students should have learned the purpose, context, and audience of an annotated bibliography and that both summaries and evaluations are required for the annotations. This activity thus aims to teach students how to write an analytic summary for each bibliography entry.

In this activity, students are firstly presented with the four areas in an analytical summary for an academic source. Students then read two sample summaries and are guided to identify the four areas in each sample. Finally, by reading and summarizing an academic meme article, students were guided to learn how to locate the information in an academic source and practice writing an analytical summary in small groups and then independently. The meme article "Are cats good? An important study" (Owen & Lamon 1) that we purposefully selected for the practice writing activity well follows many conventions of an authentic academic text (e.g., the overall structure, use of academic language). Compared with a real journal article, this one-page text is more manageable and fun for students to use. Nevertheless, a reminder should be provided that a meme article has no scientific rigor, and each section is presented in an oversimplified way.

The students are then guided to construct an analytic summary for the meme article collaboratively before they independently write

summaries for their own bibliography entries. With this scaffolded activity, students are expected to build their writing skills and internalize the genre knowledge through "deconstruction," "joint construction," and "independent construction" as promoted by Caplan and Farling (566).

Time Commitment

1 class session

Materials

- Worksheet/slides that present the four areas in a typical analytical summary.

- Two sample analytical summaries.

- A copy of the meme article "Are cats good? An important study."

- A sample analytical summary of the meme article with annotations that highlight the main areas and explain where the information can be found in the original meme article.

Activity Process

- Firstly, the instructor introduces what an analytic summary is and the four main areas in an analytic summary: An analytic summary is traditionally a four-aspect rhetorical précis of the work that both describes and analyzes the piece of writing. The four areas in a rhetorical précis include: (1) basic information of the source (e.g., author names, genre, and title of the source article) and its main argument; (2) how the study/research was conducted; (3) a statement of the author's apparent writing goals/purpose(s), and (4) a description of the intended audience and/or the relationship the author establishes with the audience. It is also

recommended that students are presented with at least an example of each area in a sample analytic summary. Suggestions for language used in each area may also be provided. For example, for area (1), reporting verbs can be used to introduce the main idea of the source; for area (2), action verbs (e.g., conduct) can be used and this part of information usually appear in "methods" of the article; for area (3), "to" and "in order to" may be used to illustrate the article author's purpose; for area (4), the tone that the article author writes in can be discussed.

▪ The instructor then presents two sample summaries and asks students to (1) color code the samples to identify the four areas they just learned, and (2) mark the reporting verbs and signal sentence structure in the samples in bold type.

▪ Next, in small groups, students read a meme academic article named "Are cats good? An important study" and collaboratively write a four-sentence analytic summary for this short article.

▪ When all groups are finished, the instructor and the students together review each group's summary to offer feedback, which should focus on the accuracy of information delivery, appropriateness, variety of reporting verb use, appropriateness of tense, etc. When necessary, refer back to the information in the first step. After this, students are shown a sample analytic summary of the meme article with annotations to further draw their attention to the organization and the linguistic choices used in the analytic summary.

The sample analytic summary of the meme article is presented below:

Area 1 (What?)

In the article "Are cats good? An important study", Owen and Lamon (2021) argue that all cats are good. (*Instructor's Annotation: This part is the thesis, which can usually be found in the abstract of an article*).

Area 2 (How?)

The authors support their argument by conducting a consensus opinion study where the two scientists were asked if they think cats were good. (*Instructor's Annotation: This part focuses on the method, which can usually be found in the abstract or methodology part of an article*).

Area 3 (Why?)

The authors' purpose is to prove cats are good since a previous study by Catlady et al. (2009) is only able to reject the statement that cats are not good. Methodologically, the authors also confirm the validity of the current method, i.e., two person consensus, for this type of study. (*Instructor's Annotation: This part is about the author's purpose, which can usually be found in research questions or the introduction of an article. Bear in mind that there can be multiple purposes. For the language features, try to think about some alternative reporting verbs that can be used other than "prove"*).

Area 4 (To whom?)

The writers write in an academic tone for researchers who share similar research interests in cats and the lay public who are interested in knowing more about cats. (*Instructor's Annotation: Skim through the entire article to determine the tone*).

- Finally, students select one source in their bibliography and try to practice drafting an analytic summary for the source.

Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this activity will:

- Gain an understanding of what analytical summary is, including its structure and language features

- Practice locating information from the source article and adapt the key information to produce a well-structured analytical summary

- Apply the skill of writing analytical summaries to composing annotated bibliography entries

Learning Accommodations

- The instructions can be organized into three parts in one worksheet or three separate worksheets, either in printed or digital format (e.g., Google doc). Students can choose to either hand write in physical worksheets or type in digital worksheets.

- The sample analytic summary with annotations is suggested to be delivered in digital format, such as using comment functions of Google doc. or Word doc. so that students may see side-by-side annotations for highlighted parts in the sample.

- For students' collaborative writing in groups, the size of grouping is suggested not to be more than four students.

Works Cited

Caplan, Nigel A., and Farling, Monica. "A dozen heads are better than one: Collaborative writing in genre-based pedagogy." *TESOL Journal,* vol. 8, no. 3, 2016, pp. 564–581.

Owen, Patrick, J., and Lamon Severine. *Are cats good? An important*

study. Center for Open Science OSF, Oct. 2021, https://osf.io/v48d7/. Accessed 30 April 2024.

"Worksheet of what is an analytic summary." *University of Arizona Writing Program.*

Further Reading

Rothery, Joan. "Making changes: Developing an educational linguistics." *Literacy in society*, edited by Ruqaiya Hasan and Geoffrey Williams, Harlow, England: Longman, 1996, pp. 86–123.