Captain’s Log (S.S. Science Discovery):
A Strategy for Organizing Information

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Introduction

This strategy is designed to provide students with a guide to help them identify and organize information from a reading. The ultimate product of this strategy is a written, paragraph style, article summary with personal conclusions. Often students will "read" a news article without focusing on, and thinking about, the ideas presented. Additionally, when asked to summarize what they read, their writing lacks organization. This tool (actually a set of tools) assists students in gathering information from a news article and then grouping facts for later inclusion in a written report.

Step 1: Identifying the Strategy

To deal with the problems of focusing students’ attention on their reading, and organizing ideas for a summary, a set of guides were created. These devices were developed around two key comparisons: First, reading a factual newspaper, magazine, or internet article was compared with taking a seagoing voyage of exploration, where the student is in control (the captain). Second, information/ideas presented in the article were compared to cargo that a ship might pick up. These comparisons help create a theme for the strategy and give the student a frame of reference for the task.

The strategy involves reading a current events article and then organizing key information into five common categories (who, what, when, where, and why). Following this, readers must develop some of their own conclusions
about the article’s topic and provide an explanation, or evidence to support them. Ideas listed in the five categories mentioned above, are then numbered and organized using “cargo holds” which will later serve as a guide for their paragraphs in a “captain’s report” article summary.

Step 2: Modeling the Strategy

The “Captain’s Log” strategy is introduced to the students as follows:

Day One

Copies of the “captain’s log” (Addendum A) and “captain’s report” (Addendum B) forms are provided. The basic goals of the strategy (improving content focus and organization) are explained, emphasizing the comparisons between reading and an adventurous voyage, and between information and cargo. Students are then provided with a “sample” article and students are asked to read portions of the article aloud. Reading through the article, students are asked to identify pieces of information and a category (who, what, when, where, or why) in which it would fit. As the students volunteer these facts, they are written and displayed on a “large” paper version of the organizer. Teacher and class finally co-construct conclusions about what was read. These should be individual thoughts and opinions, not material copied from the article.

Day Two

The pieces of information in the log (class display version) are numbered consecutively (each should have a different number). With teacher direction, the class works aloud at grouping the numbered ideas in the “cargo holds”, such that related ideas are together as they would be in their eventual paragraphs. The ability to link material in the same paragraph is stressed at this time. After completing the cargo organizer, writing an article summary is then discussed, making clear the connections between content, as grouped in the cargo organizer, and paragraphs in the report. Students are then asked to present any questions they had about implementing the strategy.

In order to further model and support students’ use of this strategy, they are given copies of a captain’s log and report (Addendums A and B) written by me and based on their “sample” article. Finally, the article for the students’ individual report, as well as blank copies of the log and report forms (Addendums A and B) are handed out.
Step 3: Scaffolding the Strategy

Day Three

In order to support the writing of the final summary, students are given the next class period to work on their reports. The teacher circulates around the room answering questions, observing work, and providing constructive criticism. Captain’s logs and reports (pages 2 and 3 of thinksheet) are collected at the end of this class period.

Step 4: Providing Additional Practice

The students are/should be asked to complete several more article reports using this strategy. Articles would continue to be provided for the class to make for easier assessment.

Conclusion

This strategy provides several methods for organizing the information found in news articles. Several finished products are possible which could assist in assessing students’ reading comprehension, and their ability to logically organize and summarize ideas.

Suggestions for Adapting the Strategy in other Grades or Content Areas

The captain’s log and report could serve teachers and students in any content area where summarizing written information is required.

Thinksheets

Copies are attached.
CAPTAIN'S LOG: S.S. SCIENCE DISCOVERY

PAGE 2

WHERE DID THINGS TAKE PLACE?


WHY DID THINGS HAPPEN?


CAPTAIN'S THOUGHTS & EXPLANATION:


*Your log notes must now be put into report form on a captain's report sheet.

CARGO ORGANIZER

You may use the table below to organize your information (cargo) before writing your report for this voyage. Number your log notes and then organize the numbers in the table below. Each "cargo hold" will be a paragraph in your report. Remember that items being "stored" together must be related to one another. Not all cargo holds need to be used.

BE SURE TO INCLUDE CAPTAIN'S THOUGHTS IN REPORT.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cargo Hold 1</th>
<th>Cargo Hold 2</th>
<th>Cargo Hold 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cargo Hold 4</th>
<th>Cargo Hold 5</th>
<th>Cargo Hold 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>