Gisting

Gisting is a strategy that forces students to eliminate less important information and focus on essential information in a paragraph. Teaching students to write gists of paragraphs can help them develop summary thinking skills.

Here are the steps in teaching gisting:

1. Select paragraphs for gisting. Start with relatively short ones of no more than three to five sentences that are easily understood.

   **HINT:** When teaching gisting or any learning strategy begin with easy material. In this way, students can develop expertise with the strategy instead of becoming bogged down by the content of the text. Don't overcrowd the cognitive workbench!

2. Establish a limited number of spaces to represent words, say 15 or so. Now have students read the first sentence of a practice paragraph then, using only the number of spaces allowed, write a statement in those spaces capturing the essential information of the sentence. This is the beginning of their gist.

3. Next, have students read the second sentence of the paragraph. Now using information from the first and second sentences of the practice paragraph, they should rewrite their gist statement by combining information from the first sentence with information from the second. Again, their revised gist statement should be no more than the allotted number of spaces.

4. Continue this process with the rest of the sentences in the paragraph. As students read each succeeding sentence they should rework their gist statement by accommodating any new information from the sentence into the existing gist statement, while not using any more than the allotted number of spaces.

5. When finished, students should share their gists for comment and critique.

**Other Important Teaching Considerations**

* Be sure to model the gisting strategy for students first. Using the overhead or board, take students through the reading and thinking process of creating a gist according to the steps described above. Talk out loud as you make cognitive decisions about essential information of a paragraph and as you draft gist statements. Allowing students to eavesdrop on your thinking is one of the best ways to model this complex mental process.

* Give students opportunities to work in pairs to write gist statements and evaluate each other’s gists.