

THE SKILL OF SUMMARIZING WITHIN THE SKILL-ORIENTED PROGRAMME IN BUSINESS SCHOOL

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Abstract

The article tackles the skill of summarizing articles of business related topics borrowed from periodicals. The author distinguishes the notions of an abstract, written summary and oral summary focusing on the latter and emphasizing the importance of mastering this skill for students of a business school.

Keywords: *summarizing, oral summarizing, summary, the skill of summarizing*

1. INTRODUCTION

In our turbulent and changing world when time is pressed and a learner-centred approach is in focus a skill-oriented program in higher educational establishments to teach Business English is definitely a good way out. Students acquire skills which they can apply in their real life already after getting a degree with no time spent on gaining enough experience or training sessions to work as specialists in the field.

How to select necessary skills to teach students in a business school is a question which inevitably arises. In this respect the problem posed is what criteria to establish to select necessary skills with the dependence on the course, year of studying English or CEFR level of knowledge.

Keeping in mind the idea that we need to develop such basic skills as writing, speaking, listening and reading, we first have to consider the skills in the oral speech as well as the written speech as we have to develop both. As we cannot leave listening and reading off board we develop these receptive skills in integrated skills. We then have to mind dominant managerial skills but take into account academic hours allotted for the course.

So the criteria we have adhered to in our syllabus and applied are as follows:

- the order of professional importance;
- the principle ‘from the simple to the complex’;
- language skills with the embrace of oral (transactional and interactional) skills and writing skills;
- academic hours to fit into.

Following the above mentioned criteria we have made up a set of skills for students to acquire and for teachers to teach within the skill-oriented program. They are socializing, making a presentation (pitching), brain-storming, problem-solving, summarizing, holding a meeting, negotiating and test-taking. Among the writing skills in our priority are: writing a business report and writing a business proposal, one per term. Basically, we rely on the Business English Certificate format.

We believe that in the hierarchy of skills the skill of summarizing is of prior importance as it is an analytically based skill which is always listed first in the national curriculum. The ability to summarize articles from various periodicals on professionally related topics is undoubtedly undisputable. If a student can extract information, process and classify information primary and secondary, compare facts, give an adequate estimation, generalize, distinguish the principal and details, see advantages and disadvantages, make conclusions, he can manage more effectively and efficiently in any sphere – from the academic to the professional. He can organize his thoughts, write essays and research papers when at school. Obviously, the analytical skill adds to his curriculum vitae. He can eventually become a

good problem-solver and decision-maker at work and lead his company to reach its highs, just be successful and prosperous in his life.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the syllabus of the Business Communication Skills in English/Business English course (the third year, B2-C1) at Saint-Petersburg State University's Graduate School of Management oral summarizing is introduced, and the written summary is not at all ignored as it is introduced at another stage, in the second year when students take the Academic Communication Skills in English-subject-specific course.

2.1. Types of Summaries

Therewith we distinguish the written summary and the oral summary. The difference between a written summary and an oral summary needs further explanation.

What is more, we distinguish the notions of the written summary and the abstract, the former being compressed gist of an article, the latter being a summary of a research article. An abstract is "short account, e.g. of the chief points of a piece of writing" [1]. The abstract is a term related to the scientific genre while the summary ("giving the chief points only" [2]) may be labeled to any piece of writing, though predominantly to books, newspaper articles or speeches.

The written summary is the gist of the text, key information with no analysis, with no details, with no personal touch while the oral summary, in our view, is a detailed (though limited in time and hence volume) structurally organized and analytically briefed article with personal comments and views shared.

When summarizing an article, students should be able to single out the main idea, support it with sub-ideas providing clear evidence with proven facts, statistics, and quotations mentioned and thereafter express their points of view on the problem raised. An article to summarize is usually borrowed from a Russian or British periodical. When practicing summarizing an article in English from both sources, English and Russian, it is recommended to start first from the English source, then the Russian source (or the source of the mother tongue). When summarizing articles on the basis of an English source, students are able to enrich their vocabulary from the article itself. When summarizing an article on the basis of a Russian source students rely a lot on the vocabulary they studied when covering a business related topic. Anyway articles offered to summarize should be related to the topic under study if students are aimed at pursuing a dual purpose to, first, command an extensive vocabulary and, second, produce an analysis by presenting the information in a logically developing way.

So the difference between a written summary and an oral summary is distinct.

2.2. Provision of Materials

To make students analyze an article in the right way, students are provided with a number of supplementary supporting materials like structural guides, a word list of helpful adjectives, verbs and phrases as well as assessment criteria.

Students are guided to follow the structure below:

1. introduction (the source, the author, the main idea);
2. main body (main ideas or sub-ideas in paragraphs or parts with some details to confirm)
3. conclusion (the concluding idea or findings, the author's position, the student's personal opinion on the information read).

A word list of helpful phrases is given for students to be able to make a more comprehensive analysis. For example, the points presented in the article are..., according to the author, the article addresses..., the article centres ..., the author considers options..., the article describes..., the author examines..., the articles gives a clear view of ..., the article focuses on..., the article illustrates..., the articles

portrays..., the article reflects..., the author stresses..., the articles tackles..., the author recommends..., et cetera.

To give students a bigger help appropriate phrases are given under such headings as Introduction, Main Body and Conclusion, i.e. what phrases may be used when introducing the article, what phrases may be used when outlining the main part and finally what phrases may be used to conclude the summary. See Table 1. Phrases to be Used below.

Introduction
1. The title/heading of the article ..., 2. The article is titled ..., 3. The article is borrowed from ... (the source), 4. The article is derived from ... (the source), 5. The article is taken from ... (the source), 6. The source of the article is ..., 7. The main idea of the article is ..., 8. The key message of the article is ... 9. It introduces 10. ... is/are introduced. 11. The first section/item/part of the article provides us with introductory comments on ..., 12. The points presented in the article/passage are as follows ...
Main Body
1. According to the author, ..., 2. The article (it) addresses smth. to smb., 3. The author (he) adduces ... 4. It analyses the results ..., 5. He believes that ..., 6. He believes that ... 7. It centres on ..., 8. It cites ..., 9. It characterizes ... 10. The author clarifies the idea that ... 11. It compares .../There is a comparison ... 12. It considers ... 13. The author considers options ..., 14. The article contains ..., 15. It covers the material/information on/about, 16. It deals with ..., 17. It demonstrates ... 18. It denies ... 19. It describes ... 20. The author draws an analogy between/with ... 21. The author draws attention to ..., 22. The author draws a comparison between ..., 23. The author (strongly) emphasizes ..., 24. It evaluates ..., 25. The author examines ..., 26. It explains ..., 27. It gives characteristics of ..., 28. It gives an analysis of ..., 29. It gives a clear view of ..., 30. It gives a description of ..., 31. It gives an evaluation of ..., 32. It gives an estimation of ..., 33. It gives an examination of /on ..., 34. It gives the idea of .../that ..., 35. It gives the opinion ..., 36. It gives recommendations ..., 37. It focuses on ..., 38. It highlights ..., 39. It identifies ..., 40. It gives an evaluation ..., 41. It illustrates ..., 42. It includes..., 43. It informs that..., 44. It introduces, 45. are laid out in ..., 46. It mentions..., 47. It offers ..., 48. It points out ..., 49. He points to ..., 50. It portrays ..., 51. It presents ..., 52. It proposes..., 53. The article proves that ..., 54. It provides us with the information on/about..., 55. It reflects on ..., 56. The author quotes ..., 57. It recommends ..., 58. The author refers to ..., 59. It reminds of .../that ..., 60. It reports that ..., 61. It is revealed that (It reveals that), 62. It reveals facts, 63. It shows, 64. It singles out ..., 65. The author stresses ..., 66. There are the following suggestions ..., 67. It tackles ..., 68. The author takes smth. into account ..., 69. The author underlines ..., 70. The author warns that ...
Conclusion
1. The article (it) concludes that ..., 2. Its conclusions are as follows ..., 3. Concluding findings are as follows... 4. The article... concludes by pointing out ... 5. The final part(s) address(es) ..., 6. The author takes a critical/positive stance on...
Opinion
1. I think/believe/suppose/ ..., 2. In my opinion, ..., 3. To my mind, ..., 4. Personally,....

Table 1. Phrases to be Used

A list of reporting verbs may also be made up instead of the list of phrases above.

To help students with the richer analytical language students are provided with the list of relevant adjectives to the phrases to be used. The list is compiled from the key elements of an analysis in the alphabetical order. For example, advantage, analogy, analysis, attention, characteristics, comparison, conclusion, description, estimation, evaluation, examination, facts, idea, illustration, information,

introduction, material, opinion, option, points, quotation, recommendation, report, results, suggestion, view, vision:

- advantage: clear, fair, unfair, decided, mutual, potential
- analogy: close, superficial
- analysis: careful, thorough, in-depth, qualitative, quantitative, ultimate
- attention: close, undivided, meticulous, rapt
- characteristics: distinctive, distinguishing, identifying, outstanding, unique
- comparison: favorable, unfavorable
- conclusion: correct, invalid, wrong, reasonable, valid
- description: accurate, clear, complete, detailed, matter-of-fact, objective, superficial, thorough, vivid
- estimation: approximate, thorough, rough, conservative, preliminary, long(short)-range
- evaluation: critical, fair, objective
- examination: careful, close, complete, cursory, in-depth, thorough, perfunctory, superficial
- facts: checked, indisputable, dry, basic, essential, proven, statistical, (un)confirmed, objective, subjective
- idea: absurd, appropriate, bright, brilliant, clear, clever, daring, general, fantastic, fixed, fresh, main, new, strange, vague
- illustration: bright, vivid, exact
- information: classified, confidential, detailed, first(second)hand, inside, misleading, reliable
- introduction: formal, informal, brief, detailed
- material: background, important, of paramount importance, of paramount interest, of paramount necessity, significant, promotional
- opinion: considered, honest, positive, negative, personal, strong, prevailing
- option: exclusive, various, punitive
- points: strong, major, minor, controversial
- quotation: direct
- recommendation: positive, negative, strong, weak, lukewarm
- report: accurate, biased, (un)confirmed, detailed, (un)favorable, firsthand, positive, negative, objective, subjective, slanted, exhaustive
- result(s): direct, overall, surefire, logical, striking, surprising, net, negative, positive
- suggestion: appropriate, helpful, preposterous, pertinent
- view: advanced, biased, clear, contrary, conservative, diplomatic, interested, outdated, philosophical, (un)popular, sound, strong, vague
- vision: acute, dim, double, keen, normal.

The adjectives may be listed not only in the alphabetical order but on the basis of the positive and then negative criterion.

What students are expected to produce are such a sentence as, “The author gives *an ultimate analysis* of the market.” instead of “The author gives *an analysis* of the market.”, which adds an analytical touch to the summary.

The sample summary scheme may be found below in Table 2. Continent Divides on the Box on pan-European advertising from Business Class' Unit 6 Pan-European Advertising. [3]

Introduction	Start up	Source, title/subtitle, main idea/key message	The article is devoted to the problem of pan-European advertising
	Plan	Number of logical parts	Starting with 2 examples of typically national TV commercials the author presents the results of a recent study of customer preferences; then he gives opinions of 4 specialists in advertising who point out positive and negative aspects of pan-European advertising.
Main Body	Part I		So, in the first part the author presents the results of the survey carried out by... According to the research the consumers liked... The author also gives vivid examples of the films which held their attention were For example, ...
	Part II		In the second part of the article the author writes about truly international campaigns. Their strong points are obvious: On the other hand, ... it is rather difficult to create such commercials as One solution consists of However, some members of the profession have some doubts. Firstly, ... (emasculating creativity) Secondly,..... (harmonization of national regulations) And finally, ... (countries with limited budget)
Conclusion	Conclusion(s)/ Author's position		The concluding ideas are
	Your opinion		The author does not state clearly his/her position but it is implied that all advertising should hardly be pan-European. In my opinion, ...

Table 2. "Continent Divides on the Box" Summary Scheme

Hereupon we would like to give a sample of the script of an orally produced summary as we see it.

“The article **is borrowed from** the Internet. **Its title** is Continent Divides on the Box.

The article **is devoted to** advertising, to be more precise, to adverts in different countries. **The authors tries to answer the question if** there are **the so-called** pan-European ads. **The main idea is that** not all ads can gain the same popularity in all countries. Their effectiveness will **definitely** depend on the culture and social development of each nation. The author **seems to seek for** the way to produce a Pan-European ad.

At the beginning of the article the author gives us some statistical data based on the research made by the Alice advertising agency in conjunction with the Ipsos research institute **proving that** consumers like the commercials originated from their own countries. The films which held their attention most were the ones with the simplest situations and the ones which appealed to their emotions and humour.

The author also reveals the logical and surefire results of the study **which are as follows:**

First, few advertisements are international or Pan-European,

Second, their most attention was due to the simplest situations and appeal to emotions and humour.

Third, the best-liked films the author mentioned were British and Spanish ads. **Thereafter** these ads are described.

Then the author gives some opinion-stated quotations of Alain Cayzac, chairman of RSCG-France and Françoise Bonnal, head of strategic planning at Young and Rubicam. **Both confirm** that not all ads cross borders well and give their grounds. **The former declares** that the truly international ads are those of Marlboro, Benetton, Volkswagen and certain perfumes. They show real imagination, a feeling of serenity, fraternity, confidence and beauty which are valued in all countries. **The latter stresses** that each country has its own rhythms and sensibilities. **Thus** the northern countries attach more importance to a rational element, while the south is more sensitive to form. **So** the French and the British think humour and variety are more important, and the Spanish and the Italians look for balance.

After that the authors states the relevant question of how to fuse all the elements liked by different nations and to be able to make an ad Pan-European and **gives the solution**. The solution given is to produce a script which is identical in each country but with different actors and a translated soundtrack. This was done by Wash & Go, a shampoo produced by Procter & Gamble.

Finally, the author gives the sound opinion of Jacques Arnaud, managing director of the Franco-American production company who **calls for** not falling into schemes for the profit of technocrats thus emasculating creativity and production.

In the very end, the author emphasizes that **on the one hand** the drive for the production of ads on a pan-European scale is what is wanted, **on the other hand**, limited budgets should be considered **as well**. The structure of the publicity markets is hardly homogeneous. **He compares** the ad production costs in Portugal which are 20,000 pounds and other countries where the minimum is about 100,000 pounds.

Hence on the way of reaching a pan-European advertisement there are a lot of things to be taken into account like creativity, common values, sensibilities of nations as well as budgets allotted.

The author's opinion and message are clear for the reader. Advertisements should consider tastes, rhythms and regulations of each nation they are addressed to. Only in such a way they can reach their target audience.

To my mind, the author states the problem about advertising correctly. It is important to count not only production of ads but also the structure of publicity markets.”

The sample summary alongside the structural scheme are also among students' materials which they can find in their Resource Pack.

2.3. Methods

The method exploited in doing the task is compressing information which includes

- omission
- generalization
- simplification.

All repetitions and synonyms are omitted, passages bearing no message are eliminated, long descriptions and broodings are dropped. If there are sentences about the same or almost the same things, they are combined into one sentence. Quotations are converted into indirect speech. Long, extended sentences with subordination are made simpler. Homogeneous parts of a sentence are substituted. Drawing from the specific to the general becomes key.

When using the method of compressing the text we deploy the technique which involves reading the article, dividing the text into clear messages and drawing up a plan to be supported. If summarizing an article is a home assignment, students are recommended to write a script first before speaking it out when rehearsing.

2.4. Formulation of the Task

To make students follow their teacher's demands on how to summarize the article most efficiently we give a clear task with precise timing to prepare and answer. For example, "Analyze the article with a plan drawn up. You have 10 minutes to prepare the task. Speak for up to 5 minutes."

As we set time to cope with the task, we should remember to limit the size of the article to read and outline its content, e.g. an A4 format page (roughly 3,000-3,200 symbols).

A ten minute time limit to be ready with the task is optimal for students to be able to read the article (one A4 format page) and make up a plan within 10 minutes. Students may back up on the plan they have drawn up, with having no original of the article in their hands when summarizing the article. Doing so students' ability to analyze the article is enhanced.

2.5. Assessment and assessment methods

Assessment is an integral part of the learning process to take into account. The teacher assesses the work of a student, which is evident. How to assess a student's oral summary?

In our attempt to reach objectivity in assessing a student's answer certain criteria are set, and students are introduced to them beforehand. These criteria can be found in Students' Resource Pack.

Criteria to assess the oral summary are as follows

- fulfillment of the communicative task (type of a summary being distinguishing);
- content (the speech being to the point and little hesitation, confident and easy to follow, with proper linking devices being used);
- contact (the speech being aimed at the listener with good eye contact and proper delivery techniques);
- grammar (usage of simple and complex grammatical forms with high degree of grammatical control);
- vocabulary (usage of a wide range of business vocabulary);
- phonological control (clear sounds, accurate word stress, proper intonation).

All in all 6 assessment criteria are set, each having a 3 point range. So a student may gain 18 points to put into his portfolio.

But to reach more objectivity an overall assessment may be used. Besides the teacher who is a traditional assessor, peers may assess a student's work and the student himself may assess his own

work (self-assessment). In this case students are provided with the assessment criteria sheets. In most cases students assess their peers' works fairly. More difficult is it to rely on the student's self-assessment. But still there are students who are able to criticize themselves and spot their mistakes and see drawbacks.

In such a way we have borrowed the working practice which is widely used now to assess employees' performance. It is called a 360 degrees performance appraisal method. "Analogous to the multiple points on a compass, the 360 method provides each employee the opportunity to receive performance feedback from his or her supervisor, peers, staff members, co-workers and customers." [4]

3. CONCLUSION

Thus we believe that summarizing should be paid attention to at a higher educational establishment, especially at Business school for students to be able to extract the most important issues, to be able to understand each quotation, each statistical figure, to be able to explain the author's message to the reader within a short period of time. When summarizing an article students display their integrated skill, namely the combination of

- the skill of active reading (extracting necessary information);
- the skill of compressing the text in a written form (drawing up a plan);
- the skill of speaking (delivering a speech within a time limit addressed to the audience – peers and the teacher).

No doubt, exercises on summarizing articles from periodicals do develop students' analytical skills, which definitely contributes to their background.

Moreover, as the task of summarizing an article is addressed to a wide audience – the teacher and group mates, assessment and feedback are usually comprehensive and reach the goal – to make the student understand his mistakes and improve them in his future work (task) and make his assessment more objective as feedback comes from all available sources. Even if some students are more loyal to their student under assessment, still the teacher when collecting all assessment sheets will have enough facts to be confirmed in his own assessment. The feedback analogous to the 360 degrees performance appraisal which students receive prepares them to their professional career.

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