

Two-Step Summary

Writer:

For each paragraph: What things does it talk about?
What does it *say* about them?

Responder:

The things this paragraph talks about: ...
What it says about them is ...

Two-Step Summary looks at what each paragraph of a draft is about and then zooms out a little bit to see what it says about that topic. This can be helpful for a writer wanting to see the structure of a draft, but it can be *really* helpful for us as readers to know what a complicated text is saying, before having a discussion about the ideas or choices the writer might make in a revision.

To give a writer Two-Step Summary, list the things that are talked about in a paragraph. After that, write a sentence in your own words that sums up what it's saying about those things. Repeat this for each paragraph.

It's Like:

Two-Step Summary is a lot like, if you're helping a friend unpack boxes after a move and your friend asks "*what's that one?*"—you might say "*it's got silverware, some cups, a vase, and other stuff.*" And then, "*I think it must be a kitchen box.*"

Example:

Paragraph 1

Things: teachers, teacher pay, school, children

What it says about those things: Teachers are an essential part of our kids' lives so we need to pay them well.

Paragraph 2

Things: parents, school, education, parents' jobs

What it says about those things: It's good for parents to be involved with their kids schooling but they are busy and tired from just trying to make a living."

Tutor Notes on Two-Step Summary

1. Read aloud.
2. Write individually, **“What things are in this paragraph?”** These can just be lists of nouns or noun phrases, but they should be things *in* the text and not implied.
3. Rotate around the table sharing from your lists.
4. Write individually, in a sentence, in your own words: **“What does it say about those things?”**
5. Share.
6. You may want to ask **“What did you leave out?”** especially if responders are ignoring whole parts of paragraph. Or, you may need to say **“Show me where that is in the paragraph,”** if they seem to be inventing things that aren’t there.
7. Repeat for each paragraph.

The Writer Can:

Do the lens

Watch out for:

Responders projecting ideas they know about a topic but that aren’t actually in the text. A complicated paragraph about institutional racism might yield a says sentence something like *“racism is bad and we shouldn’t do it,”* because the reader is familiar with those ideas, notices the topic and plugs in what they know. These are called commonplace narratives.

Background & Theory

This response was developed when we broke up Kenneth Bruffee’s “Descriptive Outline, what Peter Elbow later called “Says and Does.” We found that students would rarely get to the “whys” of a text’s paragraphs because they were struggling so much with actually knowing what paragraphs were saying. And we found that summary is often more complicated and difficult than people assume. So, we broke the summary step into two, and made the “what is the paragraph doing?” step into a separate lens called “Where and Why.”