

Summarizing a Text

Cluster 1 page 16

How can you develop a strong skill for summarizing a text?

To strengthen your skill at summarizing a text, use the following three strategies.

Step 1: Find the main ideas of the passage.

Step 2: Decide which of the main ideas is the central one and which are supporting details.

Step 3: Write an objective summary of the text.

How can you develop a strong skill for summarizing a text?

To strengthen your skill at summarizing a text, use the following three strategies.

Step 1: Find the main ideas of the passage.

If an idea is central to a text, it is often mentioned multiple times. It might be

- stated initially in one of the first few paragraphs
- expressed in one or more places in the body of the text
- restated in the final paragraph

Summarizing a Text

Cluster 1 page 16

The following is an excerpt from “The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution May Have Been the Gulf Between Truth and Fiction.” As you read, find the main idea of each paragraph.

The incident that marked the beginning of America’s intensive involvement in the Vietnam War has always been enshrouded in controversy.

In the summer of 1964, a U.S. Navy destroyer, the *Maddox*, on routine patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin southeast of Hanoi, was said to have been attacked suddenly and without provocation by North Vietnamese PT boats. Although the *Maddox* was not damaged, other attacks were said to have been made on U.S. destroyers.

continued

Summarizing a Text

Cluster 1 page 16

You may have identified the highlighted points as the main ideas.

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continued

Summarizing a Text

Cluster 1 page 16

President Lyndon Johnson immediately went before Congress and urged that he be given congressional approval to defend United States interests in the area. He got it, in what has been called the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (it passed 416–0 in the House and 88–2 in the Senate). Shortly thereafter, although he would promise in his campaign for the presidency that year against Senator Barry Goldwater not to send American boys into battle, Lyndon Johnson ordered the beginning of what became a massive buildup of men and materials in Vietnam.

Summarizing a Text

Cluster 1 page 16

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Summarizing a Text

Cluster 1 page 16

What are the main ideas of the passage?

- The incident that started the Vietnam War has always been controversial.
- In 1964, North Vietnamese PT boats were said to have attacked the *Maddox*, a U.S. destroyer, although no damage was done to the ship.
- Congress gave President Lyndon Johnson permission to defend American interests in the area. The President began sending soldiers and arms to Vietnam.

Step 2: Decide which of the main ideas is the central one and which are supporting details.

- The incident that started the war Vietnam has always been controversial.
- In 1964 North Vietnam PT boats were said to have attacked the *Maddox*, a U.S. destroyer, although no damage was done to the ship.
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Step 2: Decide which of the main ideas is the central one and which are supporting details.

- The incident that started the war Vietnam has always been controversial. **Central idea**
- In 1964 North Vietnam PT boats were said to have attacked the *Maddox*, a U.S. destroyer, although no damage was done to the ship. **Supporting idea—details about the incident**
- Congress gave President Lyndon Johnson permission to defend American interests in the area. The President began sending soldiers and arms to Vietnam. **Supporting ideas—results of the incident**

Summarizing a Text

Cluster 1 page 16

Step 3: Write an objective summary of the text.

The summary of the text should include the central idea and the most relevant supporting details. Do not include your opinion about the text. Write the summary using your own words.

Possible Answer: The incident that led to the Vietnam War has long been considered controversial. In 1964, a U.S. Navy destroyer patrolling the Gulf of Tonkin was said to have been attacked by North Vietnamese PT boats. Although no damage was done to the ship, President Johnson received approval from Congress to defend U.S. interests in the area. This led to a massive buildup in men and arms and, ultimately, the Vietnam War.