

6.3 writing

summary reducing a text

1 thinking about the writing skill

Look at these notes about summarizing. Expand them into a short paragraph.

Summarizing — v. useful skill. Often nec. — include summary in longer text e.g.

- film / book plot in review
- book / article read in essay, report
- info. researched in essay, article

Need to:

- extract important info.
- present — new words, poss. new text structure

NB summary — shorter than original!

2 following a procedure for summary writing

Look at the 'useful steps' for writing a summary. Number them in a logical order.

'Seven steps to good summary writing'

- a Make notes on what you want to include, using YOUR OWN words.
- b Write a draft summary using the notes you have made.
- c Read and understand the whole text.
- d Cover the original text so you can't read it!
- e Check it against the original.
- f Edit as necessary (add / remove points, check grammar, punctuation, etc.).
- g Decide what information to include (the main points / the relevant points).

3 understanding the text to be summarized

a Discuss the following questions with your partner.

- 1 When do we learn to speak?
- 2 Does everyone learn to speak?
- 3 Is there an 'age limit' for learning to speak?
- 4 What happens if someone doesn't learn a first language as a child?

b Read this extract from a book about language. Discuss the answers the writer gives to the questions in exercise a.

Learning to speak

THE SPECIALIZATION OF the left hemisphere of the brain for language is often described as lateralization (one-sidedness). It is generally thought that the process of lateralization begins in early childhood and continues up until puberty. It coincides with the period when language acquisition takes place, when the human brain is most ready to 'receive' and learn a particular language. This period is referred to as the critical period. In recent years, because of rather unfortunate circumstances, we have seen what can happen when the lateralization process takes place without any language input.

In 1970 a child called Genie was admitted to a children's hospital in Los Angeles. She was thirteen years old and had spent most of her life in a small closed room. Her father was intolerant of any kind of noise so there had been no radio or television, and Genie's only other human contact was with her mother, who was only allowed to spend a few minutes with the child to feed her.

As might be expected, Genie was unable to use language when she was first brought into care. However, within a short period of time, she began to respond to the speech of others, to try to imitate sounds and to communicate. Her syntax remained very simple. However, the fact that she went on to develop an ability to speak and understand a fairly large number of English words provides some evidence against the idea that language cannot be acquired after the critical period.

In Genie's case, tests demonstrated that she had no left-hemisphere language ability. So, how was she able to begin learning language at such a late age? Those same tests showed the quite remarkable fact that Genie was using the right hemisphere of her brain for language functions. Such findings suggest that there is not necessarily a single specialized brain location for language abilities. It may also help explain the fact that many people who suffer minor brain damage (with temporary loss of language) can recover, in varying degrees, their language-using abilities.

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4 distinguishing general and specific points

Look at these points taken from the text *Learning to speak*. Are they general (G) or specific (S)?

1 First paragraph

- a Lateralization means one-sidedness.
- b The specialization of the left hemisphere for language coincides with the period of language acquisition before puberty.
- c The period when the brain is ready to learn a language is called the critical period.

2 Second paragraph

- a Genie had spent most of her life alone in a closed room.
- b There was no radio or television in Genie's home.
- c Her mother spent a few minutes with her each day.

3 Third paragraph

- a Genie was unable to use language when she was found.
- b She started to imitate sounds.
- c Her syntax was very simple.
- d She developed a limited ability to speak.
- e Her story shows it is possible to acquire language after the critical period.

4 Fourth paragraph

- a Tests were used on Genie.
- b Genie was not using the usual hemisphere for language functions.
- c There is not necessarily a single brain location for language.

5 paraphrasing main points from a text

Complete these sentences which paraphrase the ideas in the text. Use your own words if possible.

- 1 The left hemisphere of the brain _____ for language, during _____.
- 2 The story of _____ shows what happens if a child _____ during this period.
- 3 Genie had been _____ from the world until she was thirteen.
- 4 Genie could not _____ when she was found, but when she came into contact with _____ she started _____.
- 5 Genie learned _____, which shows that it is possible to _____.
- 6 Genie used _____ for _____.
- 7 There may not be just one _____ that can deal with language.

Writing task

You are writing an essay about children learning their mother tongue and want to include the story of Genie as an example of someone who failed to acquire a language in the normal way.

Summarize the main points of the text in one short paragraph for your essay. Follow numbers 4 to 7 of the 'Seven steps to good summary writing'. You should write about 100 to 120 words.