

Show What You Know

Engaging, Authentic Tasks for Applying and Reflecting on Success Criteria

By Isaac Wells

Do you find yourself wondering, “How will my students get better at this?” or “What pathway will help them accomplish their goals?”

Are you worried that students are not getting enough practice or that the practice doesn't seem to be having an impact?

Have you ever had students moan or complain “Why do we have to do this again?”?

From my experience, these thoughts and concerns are common. We know students need considerable practice with certain skills and concepts but are not always sure how to make this happen. This quick read is an attempt to make the case that there are many ways to engage students in practicing success criteria without the boredom and dread that can sometimes accompany repetition.

The Power of Repetition

Repeating the same or similar tasks increases opportunities for students to deepen and apply what they know without the need for new instructions and guidelines. Students need to understand tasks completely to focus on the skills and content knowledge they are gathering and using. The predictability of transferable tasks reduces cognitive load and frees up valuable working memory so learners can focus on the skills and concepts the task is meant to develop. Even when the task changes, the success criteria, clear expectations of what a product or performance should look like, sound like, etc., can remain the same.

Connecting with Tasks

Cognitive neuroscientist and educational psychologist Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and Harvard doctoral candidate Matthias Faeth claim that "the learner's emotional reaction to the outcome of his efforts... shapes his future behavior." (Sousa, 2010) They were writing about efficacy, a person's belief, based in experience, regarding their ability to accomplish a task or achieve a goal. However, my work in education over the past couple of decades has convinced me that we can expand this thinking to specific tasks. Everyone's time and energy are limited and when learners feel connected to and understand the relevance of a task, they are much more likely to dedicate their full attention and effort.

Engaging Practice

With this in mind, we can consider a variety of tasks that will demonstrate learners' understanding and skills but allow for creativity and originality. The R.A.F.T. writing strategy, which has authors focus on Role, Audience, Format, and Topic (Santa, Havens, and Valdes, 2004) as they write, is an effective way of planning innovative ways for students to show their learning. In a chart below, I have summarized these components as the role learners will take on and the product or performance that will be created.

Applications with Summarizing

The skill of summarizing, which begins as retelling in the early grades, is an essential skill for all learners and enables students to engage in deeper thinking and analysis of the stories and information they read, listen to, and view. The checklists below represent possible success criteria for summarizing across a few grade levels.

Fiction	Nonfiction/Informational
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Retelling with Problem and Solution

Success Criteria		I need help.	I need more practice.	I can help a friend.
I am working on retelling stories I hear and read.				
I tell the main characters.				
I tell the setting.				
First, I tell the events from the beginning.	beginning 			
I identify the problem.				
Next, I tell the events in the middle.	middle 			
I identify the solution.				
Last, I tell the events at the end.	end 			
I can retell a story to share what I remember with a partner.				

☀️ I am proud of...

🌱 Next, I want to work on...

Retelling Nonfiction

Success Criteria		I need help.	I need more practice.	I can help a friend.
I am working on retelling nonfiction texts.				
I can tell the topic of the text.				
I can decide which details are most important.				
I can tell key details from the text.				
I can tell the central idea of the text.				
I can summarize parts of the text.				

What did you do well?

What will you work on next?

Objective Fiction Summary

Success Criteria		I need help.	I need more practice.	I can help a friend.
I am working on				
Title and author				
Name the main character(s) and setting(s).				
Explain the sequence of events.				
Conclude with the central message. The big lesson that _____ learned was _____.				
Use transitional words and phrases to connect ideas.				

What did you do well?

What will you work on next?

Objective Nonfiction Summary

Success Criteria		I need help.	I need more practice.	I can help a friend.
I am working on				
Include the title and author of the text				
Identify and write a central idea statement.				
Determine and explain the text structure				
Include at least 3 key details Details must come from at least 3 sections of the text				

What did you do well?

What will you work on next?

Students need countless opportunities to practice meeting the success criteria above, but that doesn't mean they can't have fun practicing. The lists below are by no means exhaustive but are meant to get you thinking. Take some time to discuss with your students and your colleagues which roles and tasks might be best for their next learning experiences.

Summarizing Informational Texts, Audio, or Visuals: Main or Central Idea and Key Details

Role	Product or Performance
Journalist/Photojournalist	- Video clips, photojournalism, or traditional articles - Important Facts - Context - Conclusions - Select a popular website or magazine to mimic (National Geographic, Time for Kids, Wikipedia) and use their format to report on a topic - Create a fictional interview of an eye-witness or important figure related to the topic – What really happened?
Detective	“Just the facts” – Prioritize only what will fit on a small memo pad - Cold Case – Research an historical event and write up a report or script a brief podcast on what is known and what is still a mystery
Influencer (Youtuber/TikTokker/Instagrammer)	- Gather or create images with captions or a make brief video to summarize the most important information on a topic - Create an ad or commercial that includes key information
Professional - Climatologist, Archeologist, Medical Researcher, etc.	- Write a report for your director/boss with key information and a recommendation - Write a one-page summary to inform your staff of important developments or information they will need
- Lobbyist - Lawmaker	- Draft a summary of important information that could be used to influence decisions related to your topic - Create a policy statement based on important facts - Create an ad or commercial that includes the main idea and key details

Summarizing Stories: Story Elements	
Role	Product or Performance
• Biographer • Journalist/Photojournalist	• Fictional character biography • Video clips, photojournalism, or traditional articles about key characters and events ◦ Setting(s) ◦ Sequence of events ◦ Problem(s) and solution(s) • Character eulogy – How will they be remembered?
• Character Within the Story	• Journal of key events and their impact • Diary of emotions and personal reflection • Autobiography • Letter to a friend or pen pal, blog, TikTok video, etc. to share about important events and their reaction
• Job Applicant/Boss	• Character resume • Character interview questions ◦ Strengths/weaknesses ◦ Key life events and experiences ◦ Problem-solving ability
• Filmmaker/Playwright	• Film/play preview • Film/play recap • Script based on a story or excerpt • Puppet show, skit, or other informal performance
• Travel Show Host/Tour Guide	• Video clips, skit, or other informal performance to “walk” viewers through the key settings and events of the story • Tour book (brief) or pamphlet ◦ Important places and dates/times ◦ Memorable people (characters) and what they did in those places • Travel journal(s) of a character or characters

Reflect:

- What are ways that you are already interesting and engaging students in their practice?
- What would you change or improve about the examples provided?
- How can you adapt these ideas and examples to your own class or school?

Santa, C., Havens, L., & Valdes, B. (2004). Project CRISS: Creating Independence through Student-owned Strategies. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt.

Sousa, D. A. (2010). *Mind, brain, and education: Neuroscience implications for the classroom*. Solution Tree Press.