

Reading and Comprehension

Level 1

Basic Reading and Comprehension

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Overview

- This lesson will cover how to read articles more effectively.
- The process will give you the bonus of actually writing a summary as a result of this process.
- This presentation covers the method, but exercises are beyond the scope of this lesson.

Part 1

The Ultimate Basics

The fundamentals of faster and more accurate reading are to use the following concepts:

Who

What

Where

When

Don't worry about the "why" and the "how" for now.

Steps

1. Grab an article that interests you (or has been assigned to you).
2. Split up the paragraphs. Work with one paragraph at a time.
3. Look for the who, then the what, then the where and finally, the when.
4. Rewrite these in a new sentence.

Now we will go through these steps together.

Let's work with this passage:

Slavery's connections to products you buy

Tomato pickers in Florida are paid less than two pennies for each pound of tomatoes they pick. That's the same pound you buy at the grocery store for anywhere between \$1.50 and \$4.00, depending on location and season. It's a poverty-inducing wage that has diminished in real value since the 1970s, even as the retail price of tomatoes has increased.

Here's what happens in the supply chain: major corporate buyers such as supermarkets, fast food chains and food service companies regularly purchase a massive amount of produce. Their huge purchases allow these companies to leverage their buying power and demand the lowest possible prices from tomato growers. This, in turn, exerts a powerful downward pressure on wages and working conditions in tomato suppliers' operations.

The result of this dynamic is thousands of workers like Antonio was – exploited, enslaved or held in debt bondage so growers can eke out a few more pennies and meet the major companies' bargain basement expectations. It's a dynamic that has existed for decades. But over the past few years, one grassroots organization has started to challenge the big buyers. And they're winning.

Source: <http://thecnnfreedomproject.blogs.cnn.com/2011/04/21/your-tomato-possible-ties-to-slavery/> (accessed: 5/20/2011)

We have here three paragraphs. We will work with one paragraph at a time.

Paragraph 1

Tomato pickers in Florida are paid less than two pennies for each pound of tomatoes they pick. That's the same pound you buy at the grocery store for anywhere between \$1.50 and \$4.00, depending on location and season. It's a poverty-inducing wage that has diminished in real value since the 1970s, even as the retail price of tomatoes has increased.

Who: Tomato Pickers

What: are paid less than two pennies for each pound of tomatoes they pick.

Where: In Florida

When: Since the 1970's.

Paragraph 1

We can rewrite this paragraph as:

Tomato pickers are paid less than two pennies for each pound of tomatoes they pick in Florida since the 1970's.

What did we take out?

The details were taken out. Use the “what” that is directly affecting the “who.” The fact about a rise in price of the tomatoes at stores is not about the “who.”

Paragraph 2

Here's what happens in the supply chain: major corporate buyers such as supermarkets, fast food chains and food service companies regularly purchase a massive amount of produce. Their huge purchases allow these companies to leverage their buying power and demand the lowest possible prices from tomato growers. This, in turn, exerts a powerful downward pressure on wages and working conditions in tomato suppliers' operations.

Who: Major corporate buyers

What: regularly purchase a massive amount of produce at the lowest possible price.

Where: None given.

When: None given.

Paragraph 2

We can rewrite this paragraph as:

Major corporate buyers regularly purchase a massive amount of produce at the lowest possible price.

Do not panic!

It is normal for paragraphs to not have some of the “W”s.

The “what” is more complicated!

Again, do not panic.

Q: Why did we include more material than simply the first sentence?

A: Because the second sentence is still talking about what the corporate buyers (the “who”) are doing.

Why did we not talk about the pressure on the tomato growers? This is because that does not affect the corporate buyers.

Paragraph 3

The result of this dynamic is that thousands of workers like Antonio are exploited, enslaved or held in debt bondage so growers can eke out a few more pennies and meet the major companies' bargain basement expectations. It's a dynamic that has existed for decades. But over the past few years, one grassroots organization has started to challenge the big buyers. And they're winning.

Who: Thousands of workers

What: exploited, enslaved or held in debt bondage.

Where: Not given.

When: for decades.

Paragraph 3

We can rewrite this paragraph as:

Thousands of workers have been exploited, enslaved or held in debt bondage for decades.

Q: Wait, aren't this "grassroots organization" mentioned at the end also a "who?"

A: It is, but we don't use it because it is a transition to another paragraph talking about a totally different subject.

We have now learned how to identify the Ws and put them in a new sentence to make paragraphs easier to work with.

This helps with comprehending the main message while avoiding getting lost in the details.

Combining the Sentences

What we have are three sentences describing three paragraphs taken from a longer article. These sentences are:

Tomato pickers are paid less than two pennies for each pound of tomatoes they pick in Florida since the 1970's.

Major corporate buyers regularly purchase a massive amount of produce at the lowest possible price.

Thousands of workers have been exploited, enslaved or held in debt bondage for decades.

Combining the Sentences

Time to combine them.

The first sentence seems like a statement.

The second sentence sounds like a reason.

The third sentence sounds like the consequence.

This affects how we will combine these:

Since the 1970's, tomato pickers have been paid less than two pennies for each pound of tomatoes they pick in Florida and that is because major corporate buyers regularly purchase massive amounts of produce at the lowest possible price and therefore, thousands of workers have been exploited, enslaved or held in debt bondage for decades.

Beyond This Lesson

As you get more comfortable with this system, you will be able to do this in your head without writing everything down. The secret is repetition. Read articles about subjects you like, and your reading skills will improve dramatically.

List of Sources

- Kloer, Amanda. "Your Tomato's Possible Ties to Slavery." The CNN Freedom Project - CNN.com Blogs. 21 Apr. 2011. Web. 20 May 2011.
<<http://thecnnfreedomproject.blogs.cnn.com/2011/04/21/your-tomato-possible-ties-to-slavery/>>.