The Shrinking Paragraph Strategy
Shrink the Paragraph to Summarize It

• Shrinking the Paragraph is a reading strategy useful for helping you to summarize what you read.

• First, learn to identify and state the main idea:

  1. Name the who or what (the main person, animal, place, or thing the passage is about)

  2. Tell the most important thing about who or what

  3. Write the main idea in 10 words or less
• The following slides offer a model for “shrinking” the paragraph.
First, the plane’s engine caught on fire and continued to burn. When Amelia Earhart flew to a higher altitude trying to put out the fire, ice began to build up on the plane’s wings. From start to finish, Amelia Earhart’s first solo transatlantic flight was filled with near disasters. The weight of the ice on the plane’s wings finally forced her to come down. Because the clouds were so low and thick during her descent, she almost crashed in the ocean. By the time Amelia finally spotted the coast of Ireland, she was so far off course that her plane was nearly out of fuel.
To analyze, ask questions such as who, what, where, when, how, and why:

WHO?
WHAT?
WHERE?
WHEN?
WHY?
HOW?

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To analyze, ask questions such as who, what, where, when, how, and why:

WHO? Amelia Earhart
WHAT? First solo flight
WHERE? In an airplane
WHEN? From start to finish
HOW? Filled with near disasters
WHY?
Put it all together

Stated Main Idea: Amelia Earhart’s first solo transatlantic flight was filled with near disasters.
Topic/Question/Answer Model

Directions: Identify the topic and decide what the author wants the reader to know about the topic. The summary should emerge when these are combined.

Topic: Amelia Earhart’s first solo transatlantic flight

Question: What about it?

Answer: filled with near disasters

Summary: Amelia Earhart’s first solo transatlantic flight was filled with near disasters.