



Get the Gist

Overview

Rationale for Change Idea: In this change idea, students pause periodically to create a **short summary of the main points**, even if they do not initially have all the details and nuances. Such a short summary is called the **gist** of what they have read. The foundation of comprehension is understanding what one reads at a very literal level. This basic idea is often referred to as the “gist.”¹

The change idea—**getting the gist**—encourages students to develop short gist statements as they read section by section and to update their initial statements to form a short overall first summary that includes aspects of the text, such as:

- **Who** is doing **what**?
- **When** is what is being described taking place?
- **Why** is what is being described taking place?
- **What** events or motivations are affecting what is being described?
- **Why** is what is being described important?

Gist statements are **not full summaries**: They are much shorter—usually 25 words or less—and can be quite informal.

Who Benefits: All students, but especially those who struggle to comprehend extended amounts of text

When Used:

- Periodically **during their first close reading** of a text, students stop to check on their emerging comprehension, that is, the gist of what they have read so far.
 - They may make a first note about the gist, for example, on a sticky note.
 - Then they revise the note as they read more.
 - If the gist does not make sense, they know that they have to do some rereading.
- **After reading**, reviewing the gist summaries provides an overview of the reading that helps students develop deeper comprehension.

¹ Fun fact: GIST stands for *generating interactions between schema and text*.

Time Required:

- Introducing the change idea may initially take 10 to 15 minutes.
 - Tell students that “get the gist” is a strategy to use during their first close reading to track and record their comprehension understandings of a text.
 - Model the process, emphasizing that students need to read a chunk of text before stopping.
 - Encourage students to comment and suggest their own gist statements.
- Developing gist statements will add time to students’ reading, but slowing down to develop these statements will be beneficial, especially for students who struggle.

Connection to Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) Goals and Priorities

Understandings and Expectations			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1: Planning standards-aligned content	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4: Evidence of student learning
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2: Equitable instruction	<input type="checkbox"/>	5: Collective efficacy
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3: Student engagement	<input type="checkbox"/>	6: Equitable and inclusive learning environment

English Language Arts Instructional Practices			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Understanding the text	<input type="checkbox"/>	Critiquing the text
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Responding to the text	<input type="checkbox"/>	Producing text

Note: There are multiple ways to implement the change idea on getting the gist. The ideas below for teacher preparation and implementation are just one way of thinking about this work.

Attention to Equity			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reflect on one’s own biases to mitigate negative impact on curriculum selection, instruction, and relationships with students, families, and colleagues. (U6)*	<input type="checkbox"/>	Emphasize assets, resilience, joy, and resistance of historically marginalized groups to provide a more comprehensive representation of their lived experiences. (U6)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use culturally relevant and sustaining approaches across grade levels and content areas for all students, with a critical eye toward serving those from historically marginalized groups. (U1, U2)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sustain students’ cultural, linguistic, and literate practices while providing instruction that promotes flexibility in their ability to navigate different cultures and contexts. (U1, U2, U3, U6)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Position students for success as knowledge producers rather than consumers. (U1, U2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Use perspective-taking to develop an understanding of the factors that influence varied points of view. (U2, U3)

Attention to Equity			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Draw on students’ interests and culture to shape curriculum, instruction, and assessment. (U1, U6)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Question the single story/status quo that sustains societal inequities. (U2)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use language to discuss asset-based approaches to teaching and learning. (U6)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Center the experiences, voices, histories, perspectives, and dignity of Native People and People of Color. (U6)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Foster a nurturing and collaborative learning community where students seek feedback from teachers and peers, assess their own learning, and set goals. (U3, U4)		

*LBUSD Understandings Continuum

“Get the Gist” for Use in Social Studies and Language Arts

- The strategy works in similar ways when students read extended text in social studies and language arts, but it is the teachers’ responsibility to teach the students key components of each content area, for example:
 - Chronological order in social studies
 - Pros and cons to an argument in social studies
 - Theme or scene development or rhyme scheme in language art
 - Character traits in language arts, including faults and growth patterns
- Aspects of the text that relate directly to what is being taught at present (e.g., causes for political unrest among the colonists in Massachusetts or ways in which an author shows a character’s personality)

Guidelines for Coaches: Introducing the “Get the Gist” Change Ideas

Why the Change Idea Is Important: Some Details

- Experienced readers create mental summaries, sometimes with brief annotations and sometimes without writing them, to check on their emerging comprehension. Writing down these **gist statements** will help students learn this valuable reading habit.²
- The “get the gist” change idea is a **way to ensure that students develop a foundational understanding of what they read** on which they can develop deeper levels of comprehension.

² See the Checking for Understanding and Reading Strategies change ideas for more information.

- When reading for the gist, students must read assigned texts closely; but as they do, they step back a bit to identify and state the main ideas.
 - The gist of a piece of written text provides a top-level view of the text, not a summary, and does not include details.
 - As students learn to use this change idea, they pause after reading one or more paragraphs to develop their own gist statements
- Strong readers stop periodically to check on their comprehension and make adjustments to their reading strategies to be sure they are understanding.
 - Less experienced readers need to be reassured that slowing down, thinking about their reading, and forming and revising initial ideas are valuable strategies for increasing their comprehension.³
 - Using the “get the gist” strategy of stopping and revising an emerging gist statement helps students learn this important habit while they also encouraging them to
 - focus more closely on what they are reading and
 - identify and note key elements of text that they need to know.
 - Keep physical track of an emerging summary of the main ideas of what they are reading.⁴
 - The strategy gives students a foundation—the gist—on which to develop a fuller understanding of their reading assignments as they go back to reread more deeply.

Implementing the Strategy With Students

Teacher Prework

- Prepare how to explain the “get the gist” strategy to students, for example:
 - “Reading to get the gist is a way to develop an initial understanding of the main points of a passage without necessarily yet understanding the details. The gist is not a full summary of the text but getting the gist is the beginning of fully understanding the whole text.”
- **Select an authentic piece of content area text**, something students are likely to read for class. Finding a text that can be read at both a surface and a deeper level is essential. It should be transparent enough that students can access surface meanings during the first close read but have deeper meanings that can be developed in the next phase of the reading process.

³ See the Checking for Understanding and Reading Strategies change ideas for more information.

⁴ See the Checking for Understanding and Reading Strategies change ideas for more information.

- Identify logical groupings of paragraphs that are complex enough that students would benefit from slowing down to do a close read but that can be summarized at a superficial—or gist—level.

Sample Instructional Routine

- After introducing the passage, model the process of reading a short section and then stopping to form a gist statement.
 - Elicit students’ ideas of what the first gist statement should be.
 - Read more text and then model how to update the gist statement.
 - Stress that the updating process is essential to strong comprehension of the text.
 - Point out significant aspects of the gist statement (e.g., dates, facts, characters) that were essential to include.
- Make sure that students understand that even though the gist statements should be short, they should include key text elements, for example:
 - **Who** is doing **what**?
 - Key characters or figures of significance
 - **When** is what is being described taking place?
 - Dates, time frame, duration, etc.
 - **Why** is what is being described taking place?
 - Motivations or causation as stated directly
 - Explicitly stated rhetorical devices of importance, e.g., key dialogue
- Model how to update **their gist statement** to reflect the additional reading.
- After students understand how to create a gist statement, ask them to read the next subsection and when students have completed the reading of assigned text.
- Have students read the next section to themselves and update their own gist statement.
 - Repeat with the remainder of the text.
- Guide students in developing a final gist statement that combines their interim statements.
- Point out that their sense of the gist of a text may have changed throughout the process and reassure them that this is **a natural part of the comprehension process**.

Have students compare their gist statements and together discuss what the text said.

Assessing the Change Idea

Students’ reading comprehension should improve if they take the time to apply the “get the gist” strategy. Getting the gist is a **first step toward understanding** because it prepares them to do the more thorough reading that is needed in content area work.

Be sure to determine how, when, and why students read to get the gist—not just whether they create gist statements.

Teacher self-assessment/discussion questions: Reflect on how well the students understood the task of making interim gist statements and revising them to eventually get the gist of the entire text.

- Do students recognize the value of using this strategy as a way to prepare themselves to read more deeply to gain thorough comprehension?
- Are students able to talk at a high level about what they have read, that is, does their discussion show that they have gotten the gist from their first deep read of a text?
- Are students who read first to get the gist and then read more deeply better able to discuss what they have read and/or to write about it?
 - Do students who use the change idea routinely seem better able to understand **what the class was learning about**?
 - What proportion of the class seems to understand?
 - Do students who use the get-the-gist strategy seem to feel more willing to share their ideas with peers and discuss their thinking in class (e.g., offer ideas, disagree with a classmate or with the author of what they read)?
- After using the change idea for a first read through of a text, how many students overall seem to be more aware of important text features that they might include in their writing and that contribute to comprehension?
- What objections, if any, did students seem to have about using the change idea?
 - How might you address these objections?
- What seemed to work well in the way the process of reading to get the gist was introduced, modeled, and structured for students?

It would be helpful to log some responses to these reflection questions in your implementation tracker. (These questions can be discussion points during coaching in addition to the general implementation questions in the coaches’ handbook.)

Rubrics for Evaluating Implementation of “Get the Gist” Change Idea

Rubric for Teacher Evaluation of Implementation			
4 – Excellent	3 – Proficient	2 – Adequate	1 – Not satisfactory
The gist statement precisely identifies the main points of what they have read including all essential information such as <i>who, when, and why</i> .	The gist statement generally identifies the main points of what they have read including most of the essential information such as <i>who, when, and why</i> .	The gist statement somewhat identifies the main points of what they have read including some of the essential information such as <i>who, when, and why</i> .	The gist statement does not identify the main points of what they have read and does not include essential information such as <i>who, when, and why</i> .
Student consistently refers to the text in talking and writing using the change idea strategy.	Student often refers to the text in talking and writing using the change idea strategy.	Student sometimes refers to the text in talking and writing using the change idea strategy.	Student never refers to the text in talking and writing using the change idea strategy.

(Optional) Rubrics for Teacher Evaluation Implementation of “Get the Gist” Change Idea

Possible Rubric for Coaches to Use With Teachers in Discussion (Not a Measurement Item)			
Teacher assessment	Possible student responses ^a		
Students who made and revised gist statements as they read a text for the first time understood what the class was learning about today.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students knew how to make short gist statements and to revise them, that is, to highlight the only most important aspects of text.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students who first read to get the gist understood the text they were reading today.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students seemed to be using the critical reading skills that have been modeled for them.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
If students hadn’t understood the text they read today, they consulted their gist statements to help them comprehend.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students who had first read to get the gist seemed to feel comfortable sharing their thinking today in class (e.g., offered ideas, disagreed with each other, elaborated on each other’s comments).	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%

Possible Rubric for Coaches to Use With Teachers in Discussion (Not a Measurement Item)			
Teacher assessment	Possible student responses ^a		
Students used their gist statements as they took part in classroom discussion .	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students used their gist statements and summary in completing today's writing assignment about what they have been reading and discussing.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%

^a To the extent possible, estimate the percentage of students who fall into this category and note those who may need extra help or reteaching.

Optional Rubric for Student Self-Evaluation in Social Studies and Language Arts: Get the Gist			
Student statement	Possible student responses ^a		
I understood what we were learning about today.	Yes	No	Sort of
Reading to get the gist helped me understand the text we were reading today.	Yes	No	Sort of
Reading to get the gist and using my gist statements helped me prepare for our class discussion or writing assignment.	Yes	No	Sort of
When I didn't understand the text we read today, my gist statements helped me figure it out (either on my own or with help).	Yes	No	Sort of

^a Select "sort of" to indicate "to some extent" or "somewhat but not as much as I'd like or need to."

