
The burrito summary

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Burrito Summary

So what's in a word? As a writer, I bet you think your word choice is important...that words convey important meanings and connotations. I do too. I am an English teacher who has been working in the wonderful world of middle school now for 20 years. (you are right to be slightly horrified, but that's another story.) I have a problem..it's called the Burrito Summary.

In my building we are working on common vocabulary and assessments across the grade levels. I used to not care what people called things in their own rooms, but now I am supposed to agree with everyone and use the same terms so that my students can understand the next teacher and so on, which makes perfect sense, except that in my building the majority of my colleagues want to use what they call the burrito summary--shortened from the full name "The Burrito-fold summary." I don't know why in education we keep coming up with new catchy names for the same old stuff...if you thought that burrito summary or burrito fold summary would be different from just a good effective summary, you are wrong. And so was I. One day while I was in the copy room, I innocently took a piece of paper to another 6th grade teacher and asked her to please show me the burrito fold parts of the burrito fold summary...and she responded, "Oh that's just what we call it. It isn't actually folded."

So, I suffer from insomnia and it is then, in those dark wee hours that the burrito summary vexes me, perplexes me, and mocks my suffering. Here are some of my not so linear sleep deprived thoughts:

Q: Where did this term come from? Who came up with it and why?

A (#1): The person writing the curriculum just wanted some kid friendly terminology and it was completely random. Had considered the bubblegum summary, but it just didn't have that "ring."

A (#2): The person writing the curriculum was told to work in multi-cultural connections wherever possible to meet market demands in larger cities like LA. Somewhere in the same curriculum guide we would find the falafel paragraph and fortune cookie introduction.

A (#3): The person was secretly working for Taco Bell on ways to increase the esteem of the burrito as opposed to the hamburger which has long been used by middle school teachers (including me) as an analogy to teach the parts of a paragraph. This answer has an entire imaginary scene complete with executives cursing the hamburger's firm hold on the US diet and strategizing ways to undermine it by sending agents into the school system as teachers and curriculum writers to plug the burrito whenever possible. You will hear enchilada occasionally used, too, but when one of the imaginary execs suggested the

use of chimichangas and fajitas he was fired because it was clear that he wasn't taking this "war" strategy seriously enough.

Q: What would happen if I start using food analogies for everything?

A: I would tell my students to hot dog fold a piece of notebook paper. Then write a burrito summary as the appetizer introduction for a full meal book review. They will be told to biggie size the support paragraphs and make sure to include a banana split conclusion. with sprinkles. and a cherry.

(This led me to wonder at the true cause of our nation's obesity problem.)

Q: What would happen if we coordinate with health and human services to inject the classroom vocabularies with exercise and healthy living terms instead?

A: We will use aero-Bic pens to pump up our paragraph writing. Make sure to remember to plan a balanced essay without excess "fatty examples" or "sugary details," and when revising to replace empty calorie verbs with active ones. It would be important, of course, to explain that while run-on sentences are never desirable, a few good freewriting sprints can only serve to help build endurance for the many marathons they are guaranteed to face in college.

Ahh. Now I am tired, exhausted really, and I can finally fall back to sleep.