Reverse Outline of Prensky Article (Sample Answers)

Marc Prensky, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants"
Reading for Context **Use this information to help you understand who Prensky is and why the article is relevant.**
1. **What am I reading? When was it written?** Look at the publication information for the article. What does this tell you about the level of quality or authority it might have? Do you think the information in this article will still be relevant to the debate around digital literacy today? Why/Why not?
- On the *Horizon* is a peer-reviewed journal associated with a university press.   - More significantly, a quick internet search will reveal the pervasive influence on this article on debates around digital literacy and education.   The article is now 15 plus years old; students must take this in account when assessing Prensky's conclusions and making comparisons. A lot can change in the field of digital education in 15 years.
2. **Who is the author?** Investigate Marc Prensky. What else has he written? What do others have to say about him and this article? Is he qualified to write an article on digital literacy? What are his research interests? Is his writing generally fun, light or learned?
- An internet search on Marc Prensky will reveal his pervasive and sometimes controversial reputation as a leading thinking on issues of education and technology.   - His primary focus has been on how to shape curriculum to take into account the realities of our digital age.   - Some controversy surrounds his generally positive acceptance of the potential for digital tools in learning, including game-based learning.   - See his bio here: http://marcprensky.com/

3. **Why was it written?**

   Based on the title and perhaps a quick scan of the article, can you determine the basic purpose of the article?

   What do you think Prensky will discuss?

   - As the title suggests, Prensky defines a difference between so-called "digital natives," a younger generation raised on digital technology, and "digital immigrants," an older generation who have had to learn to use digital technology.

   - As he defines these two groups, we can assume he will develop some kind of argument about the differences between them and why they are significant.

   - Have you heard these terms before? What do these terms suggest to you?

   Prensky's article has been very popular. Take a few minutes to go online and read some summaries of his argument.

Reading for Content - Reverse Outline Template

Topic:

State the topic or question the author is interested in.

Prensky is concerned with the effectiveness of the education system to provide students with the knowledge and experience they need.

More specifically, he wonders whether the education system is responding adequately to the realities of emerging digital technology.

Main Idea:

State the main message or argument. What does the author say about the topic?

Prensky argues that students today are much more digitally literate than their teachers. And so, he argues, for the education system to be effective, teachers have a responsibility to improve their approaches to teaching in order to engage today's more digitally literate students.

And now, outline how Prensky's develops this argument.

List the content and function of each key point in the article. Your answers may not match the sample answers exactly, and that's ok. But make sure you haven't missed any key ideas.

Key Point #1

Content:

Describe the key point. What does the author say?

The first point Prensky makes is that today's students are "radically" different from those of previous generations.

As a result of digital technology, today's students, he argues, "think and process information fundamentally differently."

He labels these new students "digital natives," suggesting they are "'native speakers' of the digital language of computers, video games, and the Internet."

The older generation becomes, thus, "digital immigrants," those who have had to learn and adopt the new digital ways of thinking.

Function:

Explain why this information has been included in the article? How does it help the author develop the main idea?

This opening point functions as the initial assumption of Prensky's argument. He needs us to first believe that students have radically different ways of thinking because of exposure to digital technology in order for the rest of his argument to be logical.

Key Point #2

Content:

The central problem in the education system today is the gap between what "digital immigrant" teachers have to offer and what "digital native" students need and want to learn.

He notes that the traditional approaches to teaching with step-by-step logic do not engage the younger student raised on fast and fragmented digital multitasking.

If we don't fix this problem, he argues, the education system will have nothing to offer the younger generation and, so, will fail to prepare them for the future.

Function:

This is the central problem that motivates Prensky to build his argument. This is the problem he wants his readers to understand and that he wants to solve.

Key Point #3

Content:

Prensky concludes that the responsibility is on "digital immigrants," the older generation, to change how they teach to meet the needs of todays' radically different students.

Specifically, teachers today must change their methodology–to educate students in a style that suits their preferences.

They must also change the content of education; traditional content should be reviewed for relevancy, and new content related to the realities of the digital world should be embraced; this might include knowledge of computer software and hardware, and the political and social issues associated with their role in society.

Function:

This is his solution to the central problem he presents.

Key Point #4

Content:

Prensky's final step is to provide an example of the kind of solution to the problem of education that he proposes. He provides an example of how education practices could be changed to better meet the needs and preferences of "digital natives."

Specifically, he promotes the use of video games for teaching, and describes examples from his own projects to support this.

Function

He justifies his solution to the problem by using his own curriculum development project as an example.

Final Thoughts

Prensky uses a central metaphor of immigration to build his article. He suggests that the gap between older and younger generations using digital technology is similar to the experience of immigrants and their children who are born into the new culture.

Do you think this is a fair and useful metaphor for Prensky's argument? Consider his conclusion that digital immigrants must change. Would the same type of argument be relevant and acceptable in a cultural context? Should cultural immigrants be forced to change?

Henry Jenkins writes an excellent critical response to Prensky's article "Reconsidering Digital Immigrants" which focuses on these issues. You are encouraged to read the article here: http://henryjenkins.org/2007/12/reconsidering_digital_immigran.html