

WRITING SUMMARY

In writing summary, you reduce material in an original work to its main points and key supporting details. Thus, a summary is something like an outline. Unlike an outline, however, a summary does not use symbols such as I, A, 1, 2, and so on to indicate relationships among parts of the original material.

A summary may consist of single word, a phrase, several sentences, or one or more paragraphs. The length of the summary you prepare will depend on your teacher's expectations and the length of the original work. Most often, you will be asked to write a summary of one or more paragraphs.

Writing summary brings together a number of important reading, study, and writing skills. To condense the original matter, you must preview, read, evaluate, organize, and perhaps outline the material. Summarizing, then, can be a real aid to understanding; you must "get inside" the material and realize fully what is being said before you can reduce its meaning to a few words.

Why summarize?

- To make sure you have understood something
- To explain the sense of a passage to someone else
- To review texts for examination

What does a good summary include?

- A good summary includes the main ideas and the major supporting points
- A good summary does *not* include minor details, repeated details, or the reader's opinion.

How to summarize a sentence

Summarize a sentence by taking out the unnecessary words. Use summary words to take the place of groups of words about the same topic. Keep only the words which tell the main point of the sentence. Use as few words as possible.

Example:

The tall cowboy put the saddle on his horse, untied him from the fence, waved goodbye and rode off into the sunset.

Summary: The cowboy left

Explanation:

You can leave out the word *tall*, since that is not an important fact. All of the things that the cowboy did (put saddle on horse, untied him, waved good-bye, and rode off) can be summarized in one word: left)

How to summarize paragraphs

A paragraph summary should be as short as possible, but it must be a complete sentence. The summary of a paragraph is the main idea of the paragraph. Often, (but not always), the main idea is found in the topic sentence.

1. Read the paragraph all the way through to be sure you understand it.
2. Check to see if the paragraph contains a topic sentence.
 - a. If the paragraph has a topic sentence, does it state the main idea of the paragraph? If so, you can use the topic sentence as the summary.
 - b. If the topic sentence is not a good statement of the main idea, write a summary which states the main idea.
3. Take out unnecessary words

Example:

Shopping malls have produced a revolution in United States shopping and living habits in just 45 years. Before 1950, there were no malls, but now almost every city or region has at least one. In fact, shopping malls have become a part of daily life. Many people even think of them as social centers. In a way, malls have taken the place of Main Street. Shops and services which were once spread over several city blocks are now in one place at the mall. Busy householders can save time by doing their shopping at the mall. And people young and old, with time on their hands, often say, "Let's go to the mall!"

Topic sentence: *Shopping malls have produced a revolution in United States shopping and living habits.*

You can make this even shorter: *Shopping malls have changed United States culture.*

How to summarize an article

- A. Take a few minutes to preview the work. You can preview an article in a magazine by taking a quick look at the following:
1. *Title.* The title often summarizes what the article is about. Think about the title for a minute, and about how it may condense the meaning of the article.
 2. *Subtitle.* A subtitle, if given, is a short summary appearing under or next to the title. For example, in a *Newsweek* article titled "Splitting up the Family," the following caption appeared: "The courts are changing rules of divorce and child custody – and often making things worse." The subtitle, the caption, or any other words in large print under or next to the title often provide a quick insight into the meaning of an article.
 3. *First and last several paragraphs.* In the opening paragraphs, the author may introduce you to the subject and state of the purpose of the article. In the closing paragraphs, the writer may present conclusions or a summary. In either case, you get a quick overview of what the entire article is about.
 4. *Other items.* Note any headings or subheadings that appear in the article. They often provide clues to the main points and give an immediate sense of what each section is about. Look carefully at any pictures, charts, or diagrams that accompany the article. Page space in a magazine or journal is limited, and such visual aids are generally used only when they help illustrate important points in the article. Note any words or phrases set off in *italic* type or **boldface type**; such words have probably been emphasized because they deal with important points.
- B. Read the article quickly for general understanding the first time through. Do not slow down or turn back. Mark off what seem to be main points and key supporting points. Pay special attention to all the items noted in the preview. Look for definitions, examples, and enumerations (lists), since these often indicate key ideas. Also, try to identify important information by turning any headings and subheadings into questions and by reading to find answers to those questions.
- C. Go back and reread more carefully the areas you have identified as most important. Also, focus on other key points you may have missed in your first reading.
- D. Keep the following in mind when working on the rough drafts of your summary.
1. Express the author's ideas in your own words. Do not imitate the original work or stay too close to its style.

2. Do not write an overly detailed summary. Remember that the purpose of a summary is to reduce the original work to its main points and essential supporting points. A paragraph summary should be between 150 and 200 words in length.
3. Do not use expressions like “the author says.” Equally important, do not introduce your own opinions into the summary; that is, don’t make comments like “another good point made by the author.” Instead, concentrate on presenting the author’s main ideas directly and briefly.
4. Preserve the balance and proportion of the original work. If the original work devoted 70 percent of its space to one idea and only 30 percent to another, your summary should reflect that emphasis.
5. As you work on the summary, pay attention to the principles of effective writing (unity, support, coherence, and clear, error-free sentences). Remember, signal words and connecting words tie ideas together. Examples: *and, but, however, first, next, then, because*.
6. Write the final draft of the summary.

Here is a model summary for a magazine article.

In “Dyslexia and the New Science of Reading” (Newsweek, November 22, 1999), Barbara Kantowitz and Anne Underwood report on advances made in understanding and treating dyslexia in children. Dyslexia is marked by difficulty in processing written language and particularly in breaking words down into separate sounds. Even though many people, including some famous intellectuals, have suffered from dyslexia, it has been misunderstood, misdiagnosed, and mistreated until recently. Now it is being studied by scientists in much more sophisticated ways, the most effective of which is brain imaging. Using this procedure, scientists measure the brain activity of patients performing language-related activities. Recent scientific findings about the complexity of dyslexia show the need for creative and informed classroom strategies for teaching children to read. Educators and researchers are focusing on early detection of the problem, and new screening tests are being used in select school system across the country. At the same time, parents must raise their own awareness about how to identify and overcome this disorder. Parents can reduce the negative effects of dyslexia by playing word games with their very young children and by closely following their children’s progress in school. Most important, parents need to provide strong moral support to dyslexic children, helping them overcome frustration and creating positive feelings about learning.

How to summarize a book

To write a summary of a book, first preview the book by briefly looking at the following:

1. *Title*. The title is often the shortest possible summary of what a book is about. Think about the title for a minute, and how it may summarize the meaning of the work.
2. *Table of contents*. The contents will tell you the number of chapters in the book and the subject of each chapter. Use the contents to get a general sense of how the book is organized. You should also note the number of pages in each chapter. If thirty pages are devoted to one episode or idea in the book and average of fifteen chapters to other episodes or ideas, you should probably give more space in your summary to the contents of the longer chapter.
3. *Preface*. Here you will probably find out why the author wrote the book. Also, the preface may summarize the main ideas developed in the book and may describe briefly how the book is organized.
4. *First and last chapters*. In these chapters, the author may preview and review important ideas and themes developed in the book.
5. *Other items*. Note how the author has used headings and subheadings to organize information. Check the opening and closing paragraphs of each chapter to see if they contain introductions or summaries. Look quickly at charts, diagrams, and pictures, since they are probably there to illustrate key points. Note any special features (index, glossary, appendixes) that may appear at the end of the book.

6. After previewing the book, use steps 2 through 4 above as a guide in preparing a summary.

In addition to that, in writing summary you have to also reflect the communicative value of a text projected in the writer's intention and attitude. To deal with it, please go on with the next discussion. In writing summary of a text as your book report assignment, you, thus, have to include these following details:

1. Title of the passage
2. Who wrote the text? (author's name, occupation if mentioned)
3. What is the aim of the message? (informing, teaching, entertaining, other)
4. Who was it written for? (specialists, consumers, children, other)
5. Do you think it fulfils its aim? (i.e. is it successful?)

For sure, you also have to pay attention to the technique of writing summary as explained in the first discussion entitled "Writing Summary". The summary should be no longer than two paragraphs.

Note:

Next week I'd like you to submit the summary of your reading report in a piece of paper. I expect you to come up with a better summary reflecting what you have read and what you think about the text you have read. Good luck!

Including communicative value of a text in summarizing

In summarizing a text (which can be in form of either book or article), you also have to be able to judge the communication value of a text which is represented in the writer's intention and attitude. In so doing, you have to be good at understanding the function of sentences used in the text. Mostly, the sentences are aimed to give either opinion or fact. There are prejudices and bias in opinion sentences which tell you whether the writer is for or against the topic discussed in the text – or in other words the writer's intention and attitude. If you fail to recognize the writer's intention and attitude, you can easily misunderstand the whole passage, even though all the sentences have been understood. It is therefore important to train yourself to ask questions such as ones in these exercises.

In summarizing, you should exclude oppinions and focus on facts only.

How do opinions differ from facts?

An opinion is someone's 'belief' or 'views'. Opinions differ from facts in that they are open to debate and cannot be proved to be true. They may also change over time.

Now, time to practise!