

Writing summaries

1. What is a summary?

A summary is a shortened version of a piece of writing

- ↳ in which you include only its **main ideas** —i.e. you leave out supporting details, examples, quotations, etc.—,
- ↳ which is written mainly **using your own words**, and which shows you have understood the text.

2. How long should a summary be?

Although there is no fixed rule for this, it is commonly agreed that a summary should be **about one-fourth the length of the original**.

3. How do I write a good summary?

1. **Read and understand** the text carefully.
2. **Think about the purpose** of the text:
 - ↳ What is the author's purpose in writing the text?
 - ↳ What is your purpose in writing your summary? (Are you summarizing to support your points? Are you summarizing so you can criticize the work before you introduce your main points?)
3. **Select** the **relevant information** —this will depend on your purpose for writing a summary.
4. Find the **main ideas**:
 - ↳ Main ideas may be found in topic sentences.
 - ↳ Distinguish between main ideas and subsidiary information.
 - ↳ Delete information that is not relevant for your summary —e.g. details, examples, anecdotes, illustrations, data, etc.
 - ↳ Find alternative ways of expressing the information you have decided to include in your summary.
5. **Change the structure** of the text:
 - ↳ Identify the meaning relationships between ideas and express them in different ways.
 - ↳ Change the grammar of the text (see *Paraphrasing*).
 - ↳ Simplify the text, reducing complex sentences to simple sentences, simple sentences to phrases, phrases to single words.
6. Rewrite the main ideas in **complete sentences**, combining your notes **into a piece of continuous writing** —do not forget to use connectors to link ideas and to show the meaning relationships within ideas.

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7. **Check** your work.

- ↳ Is the purpose of your summary clear?
- ↳ Is the meaning of your summary the same as that of the original?
- ↳ Is the style of your summary your own style?

4. Why should I learn to summarize?

Summaries, together with paraphrases, are essential tools for the university student. Being able to paraphrase and summarize the words and ideas of others will

- ↳ **help you show your professors that you have understood the original text** —whether this is a reading passage in the language classroom, a lecture or a chapter of a novel in the literature classroom, an article from a journal in the linguistics classroom, etc.
- ↳ **help you produce other forms of academic writing** —e.g. book reviews, article critiques, reports, essays, or even research projects— which reveal you have sought information to support your ideas without cluttering up your writing with quotations and, most importantly, without plagiarizing.
- ↳ **help you improve your English vocabulary, grammar and language knowledge** at large —since you must find alternative ways of expressing what the author says in the text.

5. More information on how to write paraphrases and summaries can be found at:

- ↳ <http://www.uefap.co.uk/writing/writfram.AcademicWriting.htm>
- ↳ <http://www.utoronto.ca/ucwriting/paraphrase.html>
- ↳ <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ssw/write/handouts/summary.html>
- ↳ <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing/handouts/Summary%20Writing.pdf>
- ↳ <http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/summary.html>
- ↳ <http://lsa.colorado.edu/essence/guidelines.html>
- ↳ <http://www.ohiou.edu/esl/help/quotation.html#Summary> (with exercises)
- ↳ http://www.uefap.co.uk/reading/exercise/menu_nt.htm (with exercises and keys)