

Summary writing

A **summary** is a condensed account from a longer text or speech. A summary is “a brief statement or account of the main points of something.” Normally, a summary is about one-third to one-fourth of the original. Summary writing imparts the necessary facts in a material but not interpreting it. The summary of an essay must start by reporting its central theme and then continues on to the major supporting points. Summarizing is challenging and demanding because you have to state briefly and precisely the main ideas from a longer text; you have to delve into its significance and expose it by detaching unimportant details and unnecessary association; and’ you should have competence to reveal its central idea.

Since summary is written in our own words, you must precisely convey the main point of the original text. Therefore, think about the information to be relayed, check the relationships between ideas, and arrive at conclusions. To attain this end, search first for the topic sentences because the development of the central idea depends heavily on it. Make sure that you understand the meanings of the words in concurrence with the author’s intentions. Know how modifiers put restrictions on the words they modify. Think about the meanings of nouns as they relate to the other forms of the words around them, and regard pronouns in terms of the nouns they stand for.

Finally, you must know how to extract the main ideas and important facts from the material you intend to summarize. This will test your ability to differentiate what is important from what is not important.

In sum, writing a good summary indicates that you clearly understand a text and that you can effectively communicate that understanding to your readers. It’s a technical skill that demonstrates reading comprehension and writing ability. A well-written summary is not an analysis of the text; rather, it's a condensed overview of the original piece.

Stages in summary writing

Summary can be tricky to write at first because it’s tempting to include specific details, but by following easy 9-step method, you will be able to summarize texts quickly and successfully for any class or subject.

1. Read

The first step to a well-written summary is to read the original piece of work. Focus on reading the original text without taking any notes. The goal is to become familiar with the main idea of the piece while gaining insight into the author’s specific style and voice. While it may be hard to resist the urge to underline when doing a first pass, reading the whole piece before dissecting it will ensure you’re grasping the main idea of the text without expanding on specific details. Overall, this will aid in avoiding an excessive summary.

2. Gather the Main Idea

Once you've finished reading the original piece, take time to reflect on what you've read. Think about the important points of the text and how the author constructed the sequence of events. Determine the **Five Ws** (*who, what, where, when, why*) of the story to help illuminate the essential elements of the text.

3. Reread while Taking Notes

Rereading means *active* reading. Read the story again, this time marking the important points you'll want to include in your summary. Underline topic sentences and significant plot points, highlight essential quotes, and number the major events as they occur. Also, note the areas you do not understand. Depending on the difficulty of the text, reread until you feel like you have a solid basis for your summary.

4. Organize your Notes

Once you've actively reread the text, take a couple of minutes to organize the information you've collected. Depending on your learning style, find a way to organize your notes that will make them a reliable reference when you start writing. Go back and elaborate on the key points you noted and clarify any information that was difficult to understand.

5. Create a thesis statement

The key to a good summary is a developed thesis statement. A thesis statement is a one-sentence claim, often in the introduction, that demonstrates your understanding of the author's original work. The purpose of including a thesis statement in a book summary is to correctly identify the author's argument or main idea of the text. When writing a summary, you want to recast the author's argument, without including a personal opinion.

6. Draft a Short Paragraph

At this point, you've virtually outlined the introduction and body of your summary. Your thesis statement can be used as the introductory sentence to your summary while the other main points will fall into the body paragraph. Be sure to include some transition words (*then, however, also, moreover*) to help with the overall structure and flow of the summary.

As you start to write the summary, keep the following in mind:

- Write in present tense
- Include the author and title of the work
- Be concise—a summary should not be equal in length to the original text
- Cite direct quotes if you use them.
- Don't put your own opinions, ideas, or interpretations into the summary. The purpose of writing a summary is to accurately represent what the author wanted to say, not to provide a critique.

7. Check for accuracy

Once you've completed your draft, reread your summary to make sure you've accurately represented the author's main ideas and you've correctly cited any direct quotes. Review the points in Step 6 to ensure the text does not contain any personal commentary and is written in present tense.

8. Revise

Points to remember when writing a summary

- A. Change all direct speech into indirect speech.
- B. Write in your own words. do not copy words and phrases from the original.
- C. In summarizing, you are not obliged to arrange the ideas as they appear in the original material. That is, you are allowed to rearrange the points in your paper.
- D. Base your summary on the material only. You are not allowed to add your own ideas or opinion.

Characteristics of a summary

- A. **Objectivity.** Only the ideas contained in the original material are included. Opinion and judgement are not permissible in writing a summary.
- B. **Completeness.** Every important idea contained in the original material should find its place in the summary. The reader should have a complete notion of what the original text which they have not read was about.
- C. **Balance.** Equal ideas should be given equal importance. Ideas that the author stressed should also be stressed.