

Summarizing¹

In most fields of work, you will be asked to summarize. For instance, your superiors may ask you to compress detailed information into its basic components so that they can quickly identify what action to take. In written summaries, readers should be able to understand the essential meaning. The complete document would contain details and examples, but readers would not require the original to make sense of the central ideas.

How to summarize

- Read the original text carefully. You need to understand the complete picture before you begin to write. Underline main and supporting ideas. Annotate the text.
- Ask yourself *who, what, when, where, why, and how* questions. These questions will help you identify the central idea of the text.
- In the first sentence of your summary, mention the author, title, and the time/place of publication of the original source.
- Restate the main ideas using your own words. You can keep specialized words and names of people and places, but find synonyms for other words. Use a dictionary or thesaurus, if necessary, to find synonyms.
- Do not modify the author's original ideas and intent.
- Add transitional expressions to show connections between ideas.
- Reread your summary. Ensure that you have expressed the essential message in your own words.
- Make sure your summary presents the author's point of view, not your own.

Summary checklist

Before you hand in your summary, ask yourself these questions:

- In my first sentence, have I mentioned the author, title, time/place of publication of the original source?
- Have I used my own words?
- Have I used transitional words/expressions to show the connections between ideas?
- Does my summary contain the key ideas from the original source?
- Does my summary answer the questions *who, what, when, where, why and how*?
- Is my summary neutral and not based on my own opinions?

¹ For the most part, taken from Gaetz, Lynne. *Goals. English for Academic and Technical Communication*. Montreal, Pearson Longman, 2010. Print