

Summarizing

What is a Summary?

Summarizing what you read is an important skill at college. When you summarize a text, you demonstrate your understanding of the material which you can then integrate into your own writing. A summary involves taking a passage or portion of a source material, condensing it, and putting the main ideas in your own words. While the order of the information and the meaning are the same, a summary ends up being significantly shorter than the original material.

Summary Tips

In order to more easily summarize a text, keep the following tips in mind:

- Skim the text to learn the main idea
- Read the text as many times as is necessary to understand it
- Make notes using keywords to help you understand the main points
- Form sentences using the keywords
- Shorten the text, but make sure all relevant facts remain in the summary in more or less the same order. Leave out examples and interpretations
- Be as objective as possible
- Review and reread your summary
- Record the source information

Steps for Writing a Summary

1. The first thing you should do is read through the entire article to gain a basic understanding of its content. Pay attention to the text's organization by noting the title, headings, and sub-headings. They are an indicator of what might be important. Look for the thesis in the first paragraph of an article, and look for the main idea of a paragraph in the first sentence. Read the conclusion.
2. After reading over the text once, go back and reread it again. This time, make notes or highlight the important points.
3. Make an outline while paying close attention to the main idea and supporting details. Arrange this information in a logical fashion (i.e. most to least important, chronological order).
4. Connect the sentences to make them more readable and coherent. Be sure not to alter the original meaning or add unnecessary text.

5. For the final summary, present the main idea, followed by the supporting details. The remainder of the summary should focus on how the author supports the main idea and should only contain the author's own views, not your opinion.
6. Always reference the original author. Even though you are changing the wording, you still **MUST** give credit to the author both in text and on a References/Works Cited page. Use the citation style that your discipline requires.

Examples

Original Passage:

“Even if prisoners of war participated in certain tasks, as we must assume, there could not have been enough of them to complete the Great Pyramid by themselves. The necessary labour force could have easily been recruited from the overwhelmingly agricultural population during the inundation season, when work in the fields was suspended” (Hornung, 1999, p. 22).

Reference:

Hornung, E. (1999). *History of ancient Egypt: An introduction*. Cornell University Press.

Good Summary:

The labour force that constructed the Great Pyramid was not made up entirely of prisoners of war. The majority of the work force was most likely farmers (Hornung, 1999).

Why it is good:

This summary restates the passage's original meaning and it condenses the information into a shorter and more easily understood form.

Bad Summary:

It is believed that the workforce that labored on the Great Pyramid was comprised entirely of slaves. It is also plausible that the bulk of the workers were farmers who participated in the construction when they were not required in the fields (Hornung, 1999).

Why it is bad:

The meaning of the original passage has been changed and the summary is too long.

Summarizing Checklist

- Have I rephrased the author's words without changing the meaning?
- Have I restated the main idea and only included necessary supporting points?
- Is my summary shorter than the original text?
- Have I remained objective?
- Have I checked my summary for correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation?
- Have I referenced the original source in the text of my paper and on my References/Works Cited page?
- Have I asked for help if I was unsure of how to summarize correctly?

References

Finnbogason, J. & Valteau, A. (2011). *A Canadian writer's guide*. Nelson.

Henderson, E. (2011). *Writing by choice*. (2nd ed.). Oxford.