

Tips for Writing a Summary

WRITING SERVICES - UNCW - WESTSIDE HALL, 1ST FLOOR - 962-7857

Pre-writing:

1. Make sure you understand the text. Ask yourself, "What was the text about?" and "What did the author say?" Try to state the general theme in your own words.
2. Look back. Skim the text to make sure you understand the major point. Also make sure you understand what the supporting points are. Star or underline important parts.

General Guidelines for Writing a Summary:

1. **Collapse lists.** If you see a list of things, try to think of a word or phrase for the whole list. For example, if you saw a list like eyes, ears, neck, arm, and legs, you could say "body parts." Or if you saw a list like ice-skating, skiing, or sledding, you could say "winter sports."
2. **Use topic sentences.** Often authors write a sentence that summarizes a whole paragraph (a topic sentence). If the author gives you one, you can use it in your summary, but restate it in your own words. Not all paragraphs contain topic sentences, so you may have to generate one independently.
3. **Get rid of unnecessary detail.** Some text information can be repeated in a passage. In other words, the same thing can be said in a number of different ways. Other text information can be unimportant or trivial; since summaries are meant to be brief, get rid of repetitive or trivial information.
4. **Collapse paragraphs.** Paragraphs are often related to one another. Some paragraphs explain one or more other paragraphs. Some paragraphs expand on the information presented in earlier paragraphs. Some paragraphs are more necessary or important than others. Decide which paragraphs should be summarized, ignored, or which might contain ideas that can be jointly summarized.
5. **Avoid direct quotation.** Use your own language and paraphrase as much as possible. Use quotes sparingly and only when there is no other way to rephrase an idea. Of course, quoting is always preferable to plagiarism.
6. **Check and double-check.** Did you repeat anything? Skip anything important?

Polish the Summary:

Make sure the information is reduced from the original passage. The resulting concentrated information often sounds unnatural. Fix this problem and create a more natural sounding summary. Adjustments may include, but are not limited to: paraphrasing, the insertion of connecting words like "and" or "because," and the insertion of introductory or closing statements. Paraphrasing is especially useful for two reasons: one, because it improves your ability to remember the material; and two: it avoids using the author's words (plagiarism).