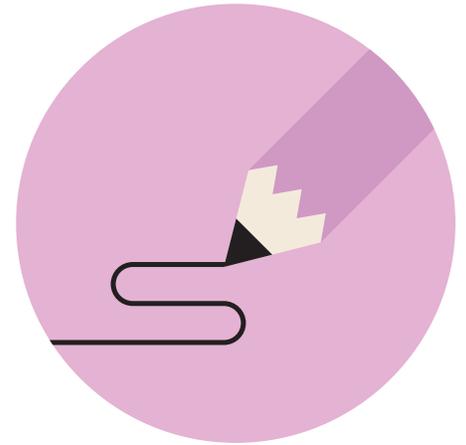


How to Write a Summary

Lesson Objective

In this lesson, you will practice using your own words to explain the main idea of something you have learned. This is called *summarizing*. We summarize for a variety of reasons in both speaking and writing. In this lesson, we will focus on writing summaries of texts.



Warm-Up

A. Writing

Find an article or blog post (no more than three paragraphs) and try to find the main idea. Highlight the three most important details in the text. Discuss the following questions with a partner.

1. What type of work did you choose?
2. What was the piece mainly about?
3. What were the three most important details in this piece?

B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many words and meanings as you can. Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context in this lesson.

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ___ 1. summarize | a) necessary, essential |
| ___ 2. paraphrase | b) shortened |
| ___ 3. attributive tag | c) to the point, brief |
| ___ 4. relevant | d) to shorten someone's work into the main idea and important details |
| ___ 5. sparingly | e) to reword in one's own words (crediting the original source) |
| ___ 6. condensed | f) to mark up or add notes to a document |
| ___ 7. objective | g) without one's own personal ideas |
| ___ 8. concise | h) in a limited way |
| ___ 9. proofread | i) to do a final check for mistakes in a text |
| ___ 10. annotate | j) a phrase that indicates who the original author is |

Introduction to Summarizing

A. What Is a Summary?

A summary is a condensed overview of the main idea(s) and essential details of a longer work (e.g., an article or story). A summary should be objective and concise. It should be able to stand alone as its own work. The target audience is a reader who is not familiar with the original work.

B. What a Summary Is NOT

When you summarize, you use your own words but NOT your own opinions, ideas, or interpretations. You use attributive tags (e.g., *the author suggests...*) to show that the ideas are not your own.

A summary is NOT an outline. An outline is a summary in point form. You can write an outline first. Then you can use your notes to write a summary in paragraph form. A summary may be one paragraph or a few, depending on the length of the original work.

A summary does NOT include specific details such as dates, times, and statistics.

Parts of Speech

summary (n):
a short description in one's own words about the main idea and essential parts of a longer piece

summarize (v):
to shorten a longer piece using in one's own words

Rule of Thumb

Use direct quotes sparingly in a summary. Only quote directly from the source if you cannot paraphrase an idea in your own words. If you must use exact wording within your summary, use quotation marks around it and credit the source.

Task 1

Look at the text on this page of the lesson. Identify the title. Circle the main idea. Place a star beside three relevant points that relate to the main idea. Place an X beside information that is irrelevant or unnecessary to the general idea of this page.

Task 2

Choose a topic from ESL Library's Historic Events section. Ask your teacher to provide you with the reading (page 2) from the topic you choose. You will use this reading at a later time.

<https://esllibrary.com/courses/98/lessons>

3 Reasons for Summarizing

There are many different reasons your teacher, employer, or friend may ask you to summarize something. Here are few of the main reasons why it's important to learn this skill.

| # | Reason | Explanation |
|---|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | to demonstrate comprehension | If you can write a summary, you know what a text is about. In an academic setting, it is important for your instructor to know that you understand the main idea of the content. |
| 2 | to find the important parts | An important reading skill is being able to easily find the most important parts and to ignore the parts that aren't essential. Summary writing requires you to practice and demonstrate this real-life skill. |
| 3 | to report to others | In the real world, you often need to summarize content to help others learn what they have missed. In a work setting, your colleagues may be unable to attend a presentation or read a report. In an academic setting, you may need to summarize a lecture that a friend missed. |

Task 3

1. Read the article from the Historic Events topic you chose in Task 2. Write five Wh- Questions that relate to the main idea.

2. Write three details from the Historic Events article that are irrelevant to a summary on this topic.

Formatting a Summary

A summary is formatted in paragraph form. One paragraph is long enough to summarize a short article, story, or film.* A summary is usually written in the present tense. It follows the traditional format of a paragraph. It should include:

1. an introductory (topic) sentence (includes the title and author) that briefly tells the reader what the piece is about
2. three to five supporting sentences that relate to the central idea (about one sentence per section of original text, in logical order)
3. attributive tags to show that thoughts are not the writer's own (avoid direct quotes if possible)
4. a concluding sentence that rephrases the main idea

***Note:**

Your teacher may have different expectations for the length of your summary.

Task 4

Read the example summary to the right and annotate it.

1. Circle the introductory sentence.
2. Place a star above the title of the original source.
3. Place two stars above the author's name.
4. Cross out the sentence that introduces the summary writer's own opinion.
5. Draw a squiggly line under the concluding statement.

Example Summary

In "Research Writing with Digital Tools," ESL Library's guest blogger Shelly Terrell offers teachers tips and resources for helping English language learners improve academic writing skills through technology. Terrell claims that ELLs need extra help learning how to organize and present their thoughts in writing. She offers four main suggestions to teachers. First, she provides resources that help students improve on process writing, such as *ReadWriteThink* and *Creately*. Next, she covers the importance of developing research skills. Terrell recommends several social bookmarking tools, including *Pinterest*. Terrell also emphasizes the importance of learning how to cite sources. She mentions academic style guides and identifies apps that make citing easy, including *Easy Bib*. Citation generators should not be used unless ELLs already know how to cite sources. Lastly, Terrell notes that feedback requires a "safe environment." She suggests using tools such as audio and video feedback. In summary, Shelly Terrell shares several tips and tools to help ELLs with their research and academic writing.

"Research Writing with Digital Tools"

<http://blog.eslibrary.com/2015/03/25/digital-tools/>

Writing a Summary

A STEP-BASED APPROACH

When summarizing in writing, use paragraph form. You can summarize a short article in a single paragraph. It may take a few paragraphs to summarize a longer work, such as a novel.

Follow these steps to create a summary of a short text, such as an article.

1. Read the article once.
2. Reread the article armed with a pen and a blank piece of paper.
3. As you reread, write down the title and author of the original work.
4. Find the main idea. (*Why was this text written?*) Circle it.
5. Divide the article into its main sections. Draw boxes around them.
6. Place a star beside one important detail in each box.
7. Read the starred parts over to yourself.
8. Put the original article away.
9. Write the main idea in point form on your paper.
10. Write points for each important detail (look at the article if necessary).
11. Get a new piece of blank paper. Use your notes to write a paragraph that summarizes the article.
12. Read the original work again.
13. Reread your summary and add any key parts you missed.
14. Omit any parts in your summary that are not central to the main idea. Make sure you haven't introduced your own personal opinions.
15. Make a final copy of your summary. (Proofread it the next day.)

Reference

SENTENCE STARTERS FOR SUMMARIZING

How you word your summary is important. You need to be concise and objective. Here are some useful words and phrases to use in your summary. Keep this page handy when you move on to the Writing Challenge.

| Use | Useful Words & Phrases |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Introductory Sentence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In " _____ " _____ covers/writes about/discusses _____ . (title) (author) (main idea / theme) As _____ explains in " _____ " ... (author) (title) _____ , in " _____ " focuses on... (Author) (title) |
| Main Idea | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The piece covers... " _____ " is a story about... (Title) The article/piece is mainly about... The main point the author makes is... |
| Relevant Details | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As _____ notes/tells us, ... (author) The article/piece/text says that... According to _____ , ... (author) A report about _____ claims that... (topic) _____ argues that... (Author) |
| Summing Up | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In short, ... To summarize, ... In summary, ... In brief, ... To conclude, ... As mentioned, ... |

Attributive Tags

THE AUTHOR / NAME / HE / SHE...

- | | | |
|----------------|-------------|------------|
| • believes | • insists | • reminds |
| • claims | • informs | • reports |
| • demonstrates | • maintains | • says |
| • suggests | • notes | • states |
| • emphasizes | • observes | • explains |

Comprehension Check-In

Work with a partner and answer the following questions based on the lesson so far.

1. What is this lesson mainly about?
2. What part of speech is the word “summary”?
3. How is summarizing used in the real world?
4. What can writers use to avoid introducing their own opinions in a summary?
5. How should a summary be formatted?
6. What should writers do after they write their first draft of a summary?

Writing Challenge

SUMMARIZING

1. Choose a news article or informational text to work with.
2. Follow the steps on page 5.
3. Go through the checklist below.
4. Submit your summary to your teacher.

A Checklist

SUMMARIZING

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Did I read the original text carefully? | <input type="checkbox"/> Did I use attributive tags? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Did I take notes as I read the second time? | <input type="checkbox"/> Did I avoid introducing my own opinion? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Did I note the title and author in my topic sentence? | <input type="checkbox"/> Did I omit details that were too specific (e.g., facts, stats)? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Did I identify the main idea of the text? | <input type="checkbox"/> Did I include a concluding statement? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Did I find three or more relevant details that relate to the main idea? | |

Writing Task Assessment

Name: _____

| Description of Task | Skills | Date Completed | Score / Success | Level |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|-------|
| Writing a summary of a one-page text | Reading, Writing | | | |

| ✓ | Assessment Criteria | Success | | |
|---|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------|---------|
| | | Yes | Almost | Not Yet |
| | understands what a summary is and is NOT | | | |
| | locates basic information from a text | | | |
| | begins summary with a topic sentence (includes title and source) | | | |
| | summarizes the main idea | | | |
| | includes relevant details in the summary | | | |
| | ends the summary with a concluding statement | | | |
| | shows evidence of planning and proofreading | | | |

| Teacher Feedback | Resource Used |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | ESL Library: How to Write a Summary |

Answer Key

NOTE:

We recommend using this lesson in conjunction with ESL Library's related lessons, especially *How to Write a Paragraph*: <https://esllibrary.com/courses/74/lessons/2563> and *How to Paraphrase*: <https://esllibrary.com/courses/74/lessons/2465/>

LESSON DESCRIPTION:

In this lesson, students learn how to write an objective summary of a written work. Students view examples of a summary and try a step-by-step approach.

LEVEL: Int – High Int

TIME: 2+ hours

TAGS: writing, academic language, summarizing, summary, reporting, writing practice, reproducing information

Lesson Objective

Review the lesson objective with your students.

Warm-Up

A. WRITING

Give your students some time to find a short article to work with (or assign this for homework before beginning this lesson). Place the students in pairs for the discussion questions.

B. VOCABULARY PREVIEW

Have students complete the matching exercise, and/or print copies of page 12 and cut up the strips.

- | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1. d | 3. j | 5. h | 7. g | 9. i |
| 2. e | 4. a | 6. b | 8. c | 10. f |

Introduction to Summarizing

Go over the information and confirm that your students understand what a summary is and what a summary is NOT. Give students time to complete Tasks 1–2.

TASK 1

Answers to the questions may vary.

Title: Introduction to Summarizing

Main idea: A summary is a condensed overview of the main idea(s) and essential details of a longer work.

3 points: A summary should be objective and concise, in one's own words, and in paragraph form. (Answers will vary)

Irrelevant info: Rule of Thumb and Definition Boxes, Task 1 and 2

TASK 2

Have your students each choose a topic from the Historic Events section of ESL Library: <https://esllibrary.com/courses/98/lessons>

Or, if your class is already working with specific texts, any one-page text can be used. Make sure that each student has a text to work with before moving on to page 3.

(continued on the next page...)

Answer Key cont.

3 Reasons for Summarizing

Go over the information and confirm that your students understand why summarizing is an important skill to learn.

TASK 3

Wh- Questions can help students find relevant information in a text. For question 1, have students review their Historic Event reading and write five comprehension questions about it using Wh- Questions. Then for question 2, have students practice isolating details that are too specific to include in a summary.

Formatting a Summary

Go over the notes and have students read the example summary that goes with Task 4. (It has one extra sentence in it that does not belong in a summary.)

TASK 4

Make sure that your students annotate the summary with the following:

In "Research Writing with Digital Tools," ESL Library's guest blogger Shelly Terrell offers teachers tips and resources for helping English language learners improve academic writing skills through technology. Terrell claims that ELLs need extra help learning how to organize and present their thoughts in writing. She offers four main suggestions to teachers. First, she provides resources that help students improve on process writing, such as *ReadWriteThink* and *Creately*. Next, she covers the importance of developing research skills. Terrell recommends several social bookmarking tools, including *Pinterest*. Terrell also emphasizes the importance of learning how to cite sources. She mentions academic style guides and identifies apps that make citing easy, including *Easy Bib*. ~~Citation generators should not be used unless ELLs already know how to cite sources.~~ Lastly, Terrell notes that feedback requires

a "safe environment." She suggests using tools such as audio and video feedback. In summary, Shelly Terrell shares several tips and tools to help ELLs with their research and academic writing.

Writing a Summary

Go over the step-based approach to summary writing. After you do this, you may want to check comprehension by having students put this list away. Ask questions such as, "Which comes first, reading the article in full or searching for the main idea?" or "Which comes first, making point-form notes or writing a paragraph?"

Reference

Encourage your students to keep this page handy for essays or writing responses that require them to summarize. They may also want to review this list before taking a test or exam so that some of the phrases and words are fresh in their minds for the writing component.

Comprehension Check-In

1. This lesson is mainly about how to write a short summary of a written text.
2. The word "summary" is a noun.
3. Summarizing is used to fill others in on what they may have missed. It is also used to shorten a longer piece for others.
4. Using attributive tags is a good way to avoid introducing one's own opinion in a summary.
5. A summary should be written in paragraph form. It should start with an introductory sentence that identifies the original source for the reader. The paragraph should describe the main idea and most important parts of the original text using one's own words. A summary ends with a concluding statement.
6. After writing a first draft, writers should go over the original text again to see if they missed anything important. They should also omit any of their own opinions or ideas.

(continued on the next page...)

Answer Key cont.

Writing Challenge

Your students will now choose another text to work with, such as a news report. They will use the step-by-step approach from page 5 to write a summary for submission. Encourage them to use the checklist afterward. If you are using this task for assessment, share the Assessment Tool from page 8, so that students understand what they will be assessed on.

A Checklist

You may want to go through the checklist with your students before they begin writing. Remind them to use it before they submit their summary.

SPELLING NOTE:

This lesson shows the American spelling of the word *Practice*. Most other English-speaking countries spell it this way: *Practise* (when used as a verb; *Practice* when used as a noun). Make it a challenge for your students to find this word in the lesson and see if they know the alternate spelling.

Extra Vocabulary Practice (optional)

Write definitions in your own words. Cut up these vocabulary strips.
Challenge a partner to match the vocabulary to your definition.

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| summarize | |
| paraphrase | |
| attributive tag | |
| relevant | |
| sparingly | |
| condensed | |
| objective | |
| concise | |
| proofread | |
| annotate | |