
Writing Good Summaries

Academic Writing

When Do We Summarize?

- Background sections
 - To report another's views without quoting
 - To indicate the general approach to a topic
 - To write abstracts for our own work
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3 Key Considerations

- The summary should be focused on the aspects of the source text that *relevant* to your purpose.
 - The summary should represent the source material *accurately*.
 - It should *condense* the source material in *your own words*.
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Key Steps in Summary Writing

- Skim the text, looking for sections
 - Determine the type/structure of the text
 - Read the text in full, making notes
 - List the key points of each section: one sentence per
 - List key supporting details
 - Make sure your notes reflect the strength of the source
 - Write your reactions or thoughts about the main sections
 - Repeat the process, refining
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Journalist's Questions

The so-called “Journalist’s Questions” are often helpful guides as you decide what to take notes on and what to include in your resulting summary. By asking Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? about events in a text, we can determine what the details are, and which are more or less useful for our summary.

Practice 9.1: Choose the best summaries

Looking at the two paragraphs on the handout, choose the best summary for each. Be prepared to explain your choices.

Practice 9.2: Write a 1-2 sentence summary

Behavioral economics, a field of economics that combines elements of psychology, neuroscience, and sociology, aims to understand why people often make irrational choices. Behavioral economists study the mental processes that help people make complicated decisions, with the ultimate goal of predicting human behavior.

Summarizing, Paraphrasing, and Plagiarizing

Paraphrasing v Summarizing

Paraphrasing involves restating someone else's ideas *in your own words* at roughly the same level of detail. The same information should be present, but totally rewritten.

When you paraphrase someone's work, you must still reference it.

Summarizing involves capturing the core ideas and meaning of a source materials and restating them in much less detail.

Summaries should also still reference the original work, but perhaps not as specifically, i.e., you may ne summarizing an entire article rather than one passage.

When Does It Become Plagiarism?

- If you only substitute some words or phrases instead of fully rewriting
 - If you borrow specific non-standard phrases without quoting them
 - You don't need to quote standard terms
 - Normal phrases also don't need to be quoted
 - If you are unclear with your references
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Practice 9.3: Paraphrase or Plagiarism?

Using the guidelines we've just established, look at and analyze the two passages that are "paraphrasing" the original selection. Is one better than the other? Could one potentially be considered plagiarism instead of a paraphrase? Why?
