**Lesson 8 (II) Writing a Summary**

**Procedures of writing a summary**

1. **Read the passage** carefully. Determine its structure and identify the author’s purpose in writing. (This will help you distinguish between more important and less important information.)
2. **Reread**. Divide the passage into sections or stages of thought. The author’s use of paragraphing will often be a useful guide. Mark each section or stage of thought. Underline key ideas and terms.
3. **Write one-sentence summaries**, on a separate sheet of paper, of each stage of thought.
4. **Write a thesis**: a one-sentence summary of the entire passage. The thesis should express the central idea of the passage, as you have determined it from the preceding steps. You may find it useful to keep in mind the information contained in the topic sentence. For newspaper stories, contain the factors like What, Who, Why, Where, When, and How of the matter. For persuasive passages, summarize in a sentence the author’s conclusion. For descriptive passages, indicate the subject of the description and its key feature(s).

Note: In some cases, a suitable thesis may already be in the original passage. If so, you may want to quote it directly in your summary.

1. **Write the first draft** of your summary by 1) combining the thesis with your list of one sentence summaries or 2) combining the thesis with one-sentence summaries plus significant details from the passage. In either case, eliminate repetition and less important information. Disregard minor details or generalize them. Use as few words as possible to convey the main ideas.
2. **Check your summary** against the original passage and make whatever adjustments are necessary for accuracy and completeness.
3. **Revise your summary**, inserting transitional words and phrases where necessary to ensure coherence. Combine sentences for a smooth, logical flow of ideas. Check for grammatical correctness, punctuation, and spelling.

**Tips on writing an effective summary**

1. Be concise by omitting the details, reducing the examples, simplifying the descriptions, eliminating all repetitions, compressing wordy sentences and changing phrases into words;
2. Conclude with a final statement reflecting the significance of the article—not from your own point of view but from the writer’s;
3. Do not insert your own opinions or thoughts throughout the summary; instead summarize what the writer has to say about the subject;
4. Make sure the length of the summary should be **1/3 or 1/4** as long as the original passage;
5. Use clear, factual expressions and write in your own words;
6. Follow the logical order of the original passage.

**Samples (Please see that PDF file)**

**Summarizing figures and tables**

Data and concepts are often presented in nontext forms. To summarize such visual devices, one need interpret what is shown in those pictorial overviews of material with a series of sentences ( usu. one paragraph.)

Example:

**Linguisitic Minority Student Population with Limited English Proficiency, Aged 5-14 (in thousands)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Projections**  **1980 1990 2000**  **Language N % N % N %** | | | | | | |
| Spanish | 1727.6 | 72.2 | 2090.7 | 74.8 | 2630.0 | 77.4 |
| Italian | 94.9 | 4.0 | 100.1 | 3.6 | 109.6 | 3.2 |
| French | 89.0 | 3.7 | 93.9 | 3.4 | 102.9 | 3.0 |
| German | 88.8 | 3.7 | 93.7 | 3.4 | 102.6 | 3.0 |
| Filipino | 33.2 | 1.4 | 35.0 | 1.2 | 38.3 | 1.1 |
| Chinese | 31.3 | 1.3 | 33.0 | 1.2 | 36.2 | 1.0 |
| Greek | 26.5 | 1.1 | 27.9 | 1.0 | 30.6 | 0.9 |
| Vietnamese | 24.9 | 1.0 | 26.2 | 0.9 | 28.7 | 0.8 |
| Navajo | 24.3 | 1.0 | 25.6 | 0.9 | 28.1 | 0.8 |
| Polish | 24 | 1.0 | 25.3 | 0.9 | 27.5 | 0.8 |
| Portuguese | 23.8 | 1.0 | 25.1 | 0.9 | 27.5 | 0.8 |
| Yiddish | 22.5 | 0.9 | 23.7 | 0.8 | 26.0 | 0.7 |
| Japanese | 13.3 | 0.6 | 14.0 | 0.5 | 15.3 | 0.4 |
| Korean | 12.2 | 0.5 | 12.8 | 0.4 | 14.1 | 0.4 |
| Not accounted for and other | 158.5 | 6.6 | 167.5 | 6.0 | 192.9 | 5.4 |
| Total | 2394.2 |  | 2795.9 |  | 3400.0 |  |

Source: "Linguisitic Minority Population with Limited English Proficiency" by Henry Treba from Raising Silent Voices. Copyright c 1989 by Heinle &Heinle/ Newbury House Publishers, Boston, MA.

**Exercises:**

The following passage is an extract from *The Lives of a Cell*. Read it carefully and finish exercises.

1)We continue to share with our remotest ancestors the most tangled and evasive attitudes about death; understanding some of the profound aspects of biology. We have as much 2) distaste for talking about personal death as for thinking about it; it is an indelicacy, like talking in mixed company about venereal disease of abortion in the old days. 3) Death on a grand scale does not bother us in the same special way: we can sit around a dinner table and discuss war, involving 60 million volatilized human deaths, as though we were talking about bad weather; we can watch abrupt bloody death every day, in color, on films and television, without blinking back a tear. It is 4) when the numbers of dead are very small, and very close, that we begin to think in scurrying circles. At the very center of the problem is the naked cold deadness of one's own self, the only reality in nature of which we can have absolute certainty, and it is unmentionable, unthinkable. We may be even less willing to face the issue at first hand than our predecessors because of a secret new hope that maybe it will go away. We like to think, hiding the thought, that with all the marvelous ways in which 5) we seem now to lead nature around by the nose, perhaps we can 6) avoid the central problem if we just become, next year, say, a bit smarter. (246 words)

**Exercise 1**: Please paraphrase the underlined sentences or phrases.

**Exercise 2:** Below is a rough draft of a summary based on the above passage. Read it and discuss in groups in what aspects this draft can be improved.

Like our antecedents, we continue to have the most confused ideas of death. We avoid and dislike talking about it. We mention it only when millions of people are dead in a big way in war. After we discover that the dead people are very few and the death rates are approximately equal, we become very confused and worried. People fear that it will be their turn to die next time, because people's fearfulness lies in their own personal death. We are more afraid than our predecessors to face the problem. However, we have a secret new hope, so we tend to think that we can avoid death if we become a bit cleverer. (115 words)