

# Zimsec Exam Summary Section RAG Document

On the ZIMSEC examination, a summary is a question that is graded out of 20. After reading a passage, a student is asked to write a summary of the passage focusing on a specific aspect of the passage.

Here's a list of strategies for summary writing:

1. Identify the key words in the summary question itself. These key words tell you exactly what you are required to do.
2. Decide what the boundaries of the summary task are. This means deciding which part of the passage is relevant to the question. The summary task may, or may not, involve the whole passage.
3. Identify the required information from the passage and list this information in brief point form. Always make a list of these points.

Write your summary in continuous prose, by linking the points you have made. Never copy sentences directly from the passage. Use your own words as much as possible, but retain the key ideas from the passage.

4. Use the following techniques to reduce the number of words you use:
  - a) Generalise a sequence of events or actions in one word or phrase.
  - b) Use one word or phrase to describe similar items or lists of examples.
  - c) Link related points in one sentence.

5. Check the length of your summary. If it is longer than required, shorten it by taking out any unnecessary words, but make sure you do not leave out any important points. Be honest in stating the number of words you have used.

In ordinary classwork or homework, you can first write a draft summary, which you can revise and polish before submitting the final version. This is to give you practice only. In the examination, you are unlikely to be able to practise, train yourself to produce a good first draft, which needs only minor revisions and adjustments.

For example, given a prompt like the following:

“Write a summary, based on the second passage, of not more than 160 words, showing what the narrators did in their childhood.”

Here's how the strategies above apply:

## Identifying the key words in the question

The key words in the summary task are what the narrator did. Everything you write must refer to what the narrator did. It would not be relevant, for instance, to describe how grandmother's two daughters left to work in Pretoria, or how the 'heathens' beat up any Christians who trespassed on their territory. You are not required to state that the narrator felt lost in the village, or that he was terrified of his grandmother, or that he found school bewildering, because these facts do not directly show what the boy did. You can, however, deduce that he took refuge in Sarah' because the sentence 'Sarah was always my refuge' implies that the boy sought or found comfort and support in Sarah.

### **Deciding on the boundaries of the summary**

The boundaries of this summary are the beginning of the passage to the end of the passage. In other words, the whole passage should be used, because it refers to what happened from the time the narrator was taken to the country when he was five.

### **Identifying and listing relevant points**

Here is a list of relevant points taken from the first half of the passage. Complete the notes first, and then write your summary from your notes.

- went to the country to live with grandmother
- herded goats with the boy from the village
- walked seven miles to and from school
- chanted in class with the others
- alternated herding goats with going to school
- ploughed, hoed, harvested, etc. with grandmother and uncle ..., etc.

Begin your summary like this:

When the narrator was taken to the country when he was five,

### **Using one word or phrase to cover similar items or a list of examples**

Consider how an original sentence from a passage can be reduced by using one word to cover the different cars in the sentence below:

- Original sentence: We sat counting the Zephyr Zodiacs, Morris Oxfords and Fords, which passed.
- Reduced sentence: We sat counting the passing cars.

### **Generalising a sequence of events or actions in one word or phrase**

Consider how the sentence below has been reduced by generalising a sequence of events or actions, in one short statement:

- Original: Households were run on a handful of change; you ate from the same plate with your brothers and sisters, wrestling with your hands for the meat - at night you wrestled for blankets with visitors from the country, while your father brooded over school fees' invoices in the candlelight.
- Generalised: Families struggled to survive.
- Or : Families found it very hard to make ends meet.