
UNIT NINE

SUMMARIES

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Of all the writing tasks, summary writing may well be the one you are most familiar with. We make summaries of many different things, including conversations, lectures, and readings. Sometimes, however, writing a summary becomes a task in itself, such as when your teacher assigns a summary. In this case, you are given an opportunity to *display* your understanding of some material.

(Based on: *John M. Swales and Christine B. Feak. Academic Writing for Graduate Students. A Course for Nonnative Speakers of English.* – Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994.)

A good summary has three principal requirements:

1. It should offer a *balanced* coverage of the original. (There is a tendency to devote more coverage to the earlier parts of the source text.)
2. It should present the source material in a *neutral* fashion. (No evaluations of any kind are allowed.)
3. It should *condense* the source material and be presented in the summary writer's *own* words. (Summaries that consist of directly copied portions of the original are considered to be poor.)



I. EXPANDING AND CONTRACTING

Notice that nothing has been said about the *length* of a summary, because this will largely be determined by your teacher. Often, teachers will ask for a one-page summary of an article or a two-page summary of a book. They may also ask for a paragraph-length abstract or even a mini-summary of 1 to 2 sentences (as is typical of annotated bibliographies).

As your summary has to be of a specific length you sometimes need to contract or to expand the information to make your summary fit into the limit.

• **Task 1**

You have to cut 30 words from the following article. You are not allowed to rewrite it. What words or sentences would you delete?

BANK RAIDER CAUGHT BY HIS EARS

A bank robber was jailed for ten and a half years yesterday after being identified by his ear “print”. Bobby Lee Clarke, 24, of Shoreditch, east London, wore a mask when he raided Barclays Bank in Aveley, Essex. He was filmed by security cameras inside the bank and his exposed ears and eyebrows were singled out as vital clues in his conviction.

Police used a computer at the Facial Identification Centre, based at the Charing Cross and Westminster Medical School, Hammersmith, West London, to compare the bank photographs with others of the suspect. Clarke was arrested two months after the raid. Dr Peter Venezis, who heads the centre, told the jury at Snaresbrook Crown Court that human ears were like fingerprints, with no two the same. “The contours of the ear match in both images,” he said.

Clarke was arrested driving one of two stolen cars used in the robbery. A sawn-off shotgun and ammunition were found in the vehicle. The jury took a little over an hour to find Clarke guilty of robbery, two counts of unlawful possession of firearms, firing a firearm with interest to endanger life and reckless driving.

• **Task 2**

Add an extra 30 words to the articles without changing the main idea of the article.

BUILT TO LAST

A 92-year-old Johnson motorcycle owned by Scunthrope Museum Services, Humberside, passed an MOT with its original brakes, tyres and steering.

BIAS CLAIM SETTLED

Susan Sadjady, 29, of Northolt, west London, accepted £2,000 compensation from the Territorial Army for sexual discrimination after being rejected for an interview as a trainee paratrooper and being told she might be suitable to do some cooking.



II. STEPS IN WRITING A SUMMARY

To do a good job, you must first thoroughly understand the source material you are working with. Here are some *preliminary steps* in writing a summary:

1. Skim the text, noting in your mind the subheadings. If there are no subheadings, try to divide the text into sections. Try to determine what type of a text you are dealing with. This can help you identify important information.
2. Read the text, highlighting important information or taking notes.
3. In your own words, write down the main points of each sections. Try to write down a one-sentence of each section.
4. Write down the key support points for the main topic, but do not include minor detail.
5. Go through the process again, making changes as appropriate.

• **Task 3**

Read the text 'Transformation of the Nile River Basin' and identify the information you think is significant and should be included in a summary. Briefly explain why you think it is important. The first paragraph has been done for you. Then in as few words as possible, write what each paragraph is about.

Transformation of the Nile River Basin

The Egyptian landscape has been changing for centuries. One area which has undergone dramatic change over the last 7,000 years is the Nile River basin. One of the most notable aspects of this transformation is the year-round irrigation of land for agricultural purposes, rather than a strict reliance on the annual flood. Conversion to continuous irrigation, which began around 1500 and was limited only by the level of technology, led to improved agricultural productivity. This in turn contributed to an increase in the population of the area.

Large-scale conversion of agricultural land involving perennial irrigation began in 1800 with the availability of more modern technology. Water could be retained, raised, and distributed to summer-crops with the aid of barrages [banks of earth or stones constructed over a river to provide water for irrigation] constructed on the Nile below Cairo and at sites on 30,000 km of new canals. Large dams were built on the Nile at Aswan in 1902, 1912, and 1933. The final transformation to continuous irrigation was finished with the completion of the Aswan Dam in 1960. This full-scale change brought about a major shift and

Reason for Highlighting

This is the topic of the passage

The effect of the change in irrigation patterns is significant.

expansion in agriculture.

Cash crops such as cotton, sugar cane, and vegetables tended and still tend to be produced at the expense of subsistence crops. Because Egyptians have historically preferred to live within or near the cultivated land area, agricultural expansion has also had an impact on the environment and livelihood of the Nile population. As the amount of land available for agriculture increased, so did the population. Egypt's population has increased from 2.5 million in the early 1800s to 9.7 million in the late 1800s, 18.8 million in the 1940s, 37 million in the mid-70s, 46 million in 1984. The population is projected to be 65 million by the year 2000. In 1907, urban dwellers constituted only 17% of Egypt's population. By 1976, however, they were 43% of the total. Recent studies have indicated that 1-2% of Egypt's arable land is lost annually to human encroachment

(Steven M. Goodman, Peter Meininger, et al., eds. 1989. *The Birds of Egypt*.)

● **Task 4**

The 'Nile' passage is fairly easy to summarize because it is factual, has three clear-cut sections, and follows a chronology. Take a look at some attempts of summarizing the 3rd paragraph. Which summary provides the right amount of detail? Explain your choice.

1. In the early 1800s the population of Egypt was 2.5 million. By the late 1800s it was 9.7 million. In the 40s the population reached

18.8 million; by the mid-70s it had reached 37 million. In 1984 the population was 46 million. In the year 2000 it is estimated that there will be 65 million Egyptians. 1 to 2 percent of Egypt's fertile land is disappearing annually as a result of the growth.

2. In the 1800s Egypt's population increased from 2.5 m to 9.7 m. In the 1900s it grew again, from 18.8 m in the 1940s to 46 m in 1984. By the year 2000, population will be 1.5 times that in 1984. A result of this population growth is annual 1-2% loss in the amount of fertile land.

3. The Egyptian population has increased from 2.5 mln in the early 1800s to 46 mln in 1984. It is expected to reach 65 mln by the year 2000. Along with this population growth, Egypt has also experienced a yearly 1-2% loss in the amount of fertile land.

4. The Egyptian population has dramatically increased since the 1800s and is expected to continue to increase. A small percentage of agricultural land is lost each year because of the growth in population.

5. The Egyptian population in 1984 was nearly 20 times that in the early 1800s. By the year 2000, it should reach 65 million. Egypt is also losing agricultural land as a result of the population increase.

- *Now attempt your own summary of the third paragraph.*



III. PARAPHRASING AND PLAGIARISM

Paraphrasing the original is an obvious approach to writing a summary.

A paraphrase is a restatement (in your own words) of the ideas in the original. The most common strategy used to accomplish paraphrasing involves replacing words in the source with synonyms and perhaps changing the grammar, e.g.:

Although it would be beneficial for the world economy to have uniform patent laws, each country has its own laws. → *Every country has unique patent laws, even though the world economy would be improved if they were consistent.*

Do you think the above paraphrase example is a reasonable representation of the original?

This method can often be successful, but if you do this sentence by sentence, you will most likely not demonstrate your full understanding of the passage/article to be summarized. Another weakness is that the resulting summary is not original and would be considered plagiarism by many people.

Simple synonym substitution is often not considered to be original work. Far more needs to be changed from the original source. A better, but more difficult strategy for summary writing would be to *carefully consider the elements you find important, put the original away, and write down what you have understood*. This may allow you to condense the ideas in the source even further.

When you write a formal summary of someone else's ideas, you should keep in mind the following GUIDELINES:

1. Always try to use your own words, except for technical (special) terms. (If you are taking notes for yourself, direct copying is OK, but it is a good idea to indicate in your notes when you are directly copying.)
2. Include enough support and detail so that the presentation is clear.
3. Do not try to paraphrase specialized vocabulary or technical terms.
4. Include nothing more than what is contained in the original. (Do not include your own comments or evaluation. You can do that in a critique.)
5. Make sure the summary reads smoothly. Use enough transition phrases and supporting detail. Mind the flow of your summary text. Having written a summary, proofread and edit it.

Plagiarism is best defined as a deliberate activity — as the conscious copying from the work of others. It's the dishonest act of presenting the words or thoughts of another writer as if they were your own. You commit plagiarism whenever you use a source in any way without indicating that you have used it.

The concept of plagiarism has become an integral part of the civilized academic cultures. It is based on a number of assumptions:

- 1) the writer is an original, individual, creative artist;
- 2) original ideas are the acknowledged property of their creators (as is the case with a patent for an invention);

3) it is a sign of disrespect — rather than respect — to copy without acknowledgment from the published works.

Of course, borrowing the words and phrases of others can be a useful language learning strategy. Certainly, you would not be plagiarizing if you borrowed items that are frequently used in academic English or that are part of common knowledge, e.g.:

An increase in demand often leads to an increase in price.

The results from this experiment seem to suggest that ...

These results are statistically significant.

• **Task 5**

Here are some approaches to writing, beginning with a plagiarism approach and ending with an acceptable quoting technique. Where does plagiarism stop? Draw a line between the last approach that would produce plagiarism and the first approach that would produce acceptable original work.

1. Copying a paragraph as it is from the source without any acknowledgment.

2. Copying a paragraph making only small changes, such as replacing a few verbs or adjectives with synonyms.

3. Cutting and pasting a paragraph by using the sentence of the original, but leaving one or two out, or by putting one or two sentences in a different order.

4. Composing a paragraph by taking short standard phrases from a number of sources and putting them together with some words of your own.

5. Paraphrasing a paragraph by rewriting with substantial changes in language and organization, amount of detail, and examples.

6. Quoting a paragraph by placing it in block format with the source cited.

• **Task 6**

Read this two-paragraph passage. Then read the summary that follows, and indicate whether any part of the summary – aside from the word “motifs” – should be in quotation marks to avoid plagiarism.

And, speaking more generally, it is plain foolishness to believe in ready-made systematic guides to dream interpretation, as if one could

simply buy a reference book and look up a particular symbol. No dream symbol can be separated from the individual who dreams it, and there is no definite or straightforward interpretation of any dream. Each individual varies so much in the way that his unconscious complements or compensates his conscious mind that it is impossible to be sure how far dreams and their symbols can be classified at all.

It is true that there are dreams and single symbols (I should prefer to call them “motifs”) that are typical and often occur. Among such motifs are falling, flying, being persecuted by dangerous animals or hostile men, being insufficiently or absurdly clothed in public places, being in a hurry or lost in a milling crowd, fighting with useless weapons or being wholly defenceless, running hard yet getting nowhere. A typical infantile motif is the dream of growing infinitely small or infinitely big, or being transformed from one to the other – as you find it, for instance, in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*. But I must stress again that these are motifs that must be considered in the context of the dream itself, not as self-explanatory ciphers.

- Carl G. Jung, “Approaching the Unconscious”, *Man and His Symbols*, ed. Jung and M.-L. von Franz (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964, 53).

Summary:

According to Carl G. Jung in “Approaching the Unconscious,” it would be just plain foolishness for anyone to think he or she could interpret dreams by buying a ready-made reference book. No such guide has value because it is impossible to separate a dream symbol from the person who dreams it, and the unconscious of everyone is unique. Jung does admit that certain dreams and symbols come often to many. Calling these “motifs”, he lists several, including falling, fighting with useless weapons, and running hard yet getting nowhere. But he emphasises that even the motifs cannot be understood properly unless considered in the context of each dream itself.

• Task 7

Paraphrase each of the following passages in one sentence.

1. “A good city street neighbourhood achieves a marvel of balance between its people’s determination to have essential privacy and their

simultaneous wishes for differing degrees of contact, enjoyment, or help from people around.”

Jane Jacobs

2. “Today it is not unusual for a student, even if he works part time at college and full time during the summer, to accrue \$5,000 in loans after four years – loans that he must start to repay one year after graduation.”

William Zinsser

• **Task 8**

The following sentences are too wordy. Paraphrase them by making them more concise. Do not drop anything essential to their meaning.

Example:

The chipmunk that was hiding in the stone wall put his head out warily.

Paraphrased: The chipmunk hiding in the stone wall put his head out warily.

1. The kitchen in the old farmhouse has a stove that is wood-burning.

2. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, the hero is threatened by a giant who has only one eye.

3. There are two reasons that I have for not going to St. Louis: the first is that I have to write an essay for my English class; the second is that I cannot afford a bus ticket.

4. There is one good trait which Mary has, and that is generosity.

5. The fact that the president arrived in Beijing was reported today in the *New York Times*.

6. The only differences between the two cars are those of size and weight.

7. The reason for her attack on the book is her hatred of obscenity.

8. The general ordered his troops to advance forward quickly.

9. I have never read a biography of the life of Mackenzie King.

10. She sang in a charming way.



IV. QUOTING

Sometimes you should quote rather than summarize a statement. In quoting, observe the following guidelines:

1. Quote accurately. Be careful to avoid mistakes of any kind. After copying a passage, always proofread your version, comparing it with the original.

2. Use quotation marks to indicate the beginning and the end of quoted material.

3. Use ellipses/dots (...) to indicate that you have deliberately omitted words in writing out the quotation. Be careful not to make an omission that distorts the original.

4. Use brackets [] to mark explanatory words added within a quotation.



V. THE FIRST SENTENCE IN A SUMMARY

Most summaries begin with a sentence containing two elements: the source and the main idea. The present tense is used here:

In his paper ‘Global Implications of Patent Law Variations’ [published in ...], K. Suzuki [2009] states that lack of consistency in the world’s patent law is a serious problem.

Other examples may have the following structure:

1. In X’s article ‘.....’, _____ is discussed.
(main idea)
2. X and Y’s 2009 paper on _____ discusses _____.
(subject) (main idea)
3. According to N.N. in her article ‘.....’ published in ‘.....’, 2009, Vol. 1, _____.
(main idea).
4. Author X in his book [*title in italics*] states / claims / argues / maintains that _____ [main idea].
5. N.N., in her article ‘.....’ states / maintains / suggests / claims that _____ [main idea].



VI. OBJECTIVITY OF REPORTING VERBS

Although, in theory, summaries are supposed to be objective, this not entirely true. A wide range of reporting verbs can be used in summary writing, many of which reveal the summary writer's *personal attitude* toward the source material. Some of the *evaluative verbs* allow the writer of the summary to convey his/her attitude, for example, instead of 'the author states that ...' one can write 'the author alleges that ...' Some reporting verbs, are less objective than others.

• Task 9

Can you identify which verbs seem to be objective and which verbs tend to be evaluative? The first answer has been provided for you.

Objectivity of Reporting Verbs

Verb	Objective	Evaluative
describe	X	
discuss		
state		
present		
explain		
maintain		
examine		
affirm		
argue		
reveal		
presume		
assume		
assert		
contend		
allege		
claim		
imply		

• Task 10

Here are some of the introductory statements that students wrote for a summary of the 'Nile' passage in Task One. Which, if any, would you prefer to have written? Why? Edit the weaker sentences.

1. Author Steven Goodman in 'Transformation of the Nile River Basin' states that how the region has changed as a result of continuous irrigation.

2. 'Transformation of the Nile River Basin' by Steven Goodman claims that changes in irrigation have led to an increase in population.

3. According to 'Transformation of the Nile River Basin' Steven Goodman suggests that the Nile River basin has been changed.

4. Goodman in 'Transformation of the Nile River Basin' mentions that irrigation has had an impact on the environment and the population.

5. In Goodman's 'Transformation of the Nile River Basin', the Nile River basin has been transformed by the introduction of perennial irrigation.

NB: If you are summarizing another author's work as part of a longer paper, you may make a reference to your source material in the following way:

a. Goodman (2009) has found a correlation between the increase in agricultural fertility and the shift away from traditional crops.

b. A correlation between the increase in agricultural fertility and the shift away from traditional crops has been identified (Goodman, 2009).

c. In his recent study of the Nile River basin, Goodman (2009) established a correlation between the increase in agricultural fertility and the shift away from traditional crops. Goodman also noticed...

How does the citation in sentence *b* differ from sentences *a* and *c*?

In engineering, it may be more common to use reference numbers (footnotes): Crystals are used in electrical signals.¹



VII. SUMMARY REMINDER PHRASES

In a long summary, you may want to remind your reader that you are summarizing:

The author goes on to say that...

The article further states that...

X. also argues / believes that...

X. concludes that...

In the second half of the paper, X. presents...

In fact, you may want to mention the author's name at three points in your summary — the beginning, the middle, and the end. In a short summary, it would not be appropriate. When you *do* mention the author in the middle or end of the summary, be sure to use the surname only: Goodman goes on to say... Suzuki also believes that...

Some of the following linking words and phrases may be useful in introducing additional information:

additionally

also

furthermore

in addition to

further

moreover

The author *further* argues that...

• Task 11

Try to improve the following sentences:

1. In addition, the article also discusses about the dangers of...
2. In Smith's article, he also points out that...
3. Harmon concludes that current regulations need to be re-examined.
4. Smith concludes about the current changes in regulations.

• Task 12

- a) Complete your own summary of the Nile passage in Task One. Try to limit yourself to 150 words or less.
- b) Choose a short article or article passage from your field of study and write a summary.

• **Task 13**

Prepare a 3 to 4-minute presentation summarizing the article or book you have read and be ready to make it in class. Make sure your presentation meets the requirements discussed in “Basics of Academic Speaking”.



VIII. CHECKLIST

1. The first sentence in your summary includes the name of the author of the original, its title, date of publishing and the main idea.
2. Your summary is of the length required by the teacher; it is considerably shorter than the original text.
3. Your summary doesn't include all the minor details of the text.
4. The summary covers all the parts of the original
5. You don't include your own comments or evaluation.
6. You don't copy portions of the original. Instead, you paraphrase the material (except specialized vocabulary or technical terms).
7. When necessary, you use quotations.
8. Your summary includes enough support and detail.
9. You maintain the flow of your summary by using transitions.