

Summarising and Paraphrasing

Summarising: condensing, or shortening, a reading selection without changing its overall meaning. Reasons for summarising might include:

- demonstrating your understanding of a reading
- establishing the ideas you will discuss and/or analyse in an essay
- introducing the reading selection you will discuss in an essay
- informing a reader (for example, when summarising a source that the reader has not read)
- for yourself (i.e. not for an assignment to turn in), in order to make notes about a book you have read while doing research for a paper or exam – it also helps you find out if you have really understood the book and know what the main point is

Summarising nonfiction

- Generally, your goal is to summarise the writer's opinion about the subject being discussed. You need to distinguish between main ideas and secondary details.
- Sometimes you will find the main idea is already clearly stated within one sentence. Rewrite the thought in your own words to summarise it.

ORIGINAL TEXT: For me the most interesting thing about a solitary life, and mine has been that for the last twenty years, is that it becomes increasingly rewarding. When I can wake up and watch the sun rise over the ocean, as I do most days, and know that I have an entire day ahead, uninterrupted, in which to write a few pages, take a walk with my dog, lie down in the afternoon for a long think (why does one think better in a horizontal position?), read and listen to music, I am flooded with happiness. -
- May Sarton, "The Rewards of Living a Solitary Life"

SUMMARY: Living alone is a joyful experience in that it becomes more fulfilling as time passes.

- More often, though, you must search through the reading and combine several sentences that contain important ideas in order to summarise the overall statement being made in the passage.

ORIGINAL TEXT: There's no doubt that American education does not meet high standards in such basic skills as mathematics and language. And we realize that our youngsters are ignorant of Latin, put Mussolini in the same category as Dostoevski, cannot recite the Periodic Table by heart. Would we, however, prefer to stuff the developing little heads of our children with hundreds of geometry problems, the names of rivers in Brazil and 50 lines from *The Canterbury Tales*? Do we really want to retard their impulses, frustrate their opportunities for selfexpression?
- Kie Ho, "We Should Cherish Our Children's Freedom to Think"

SUMMARY: Although American education does not meet high standards in certain basic skills, it does provide valuable opportunities for self-expression.

- In the first example, the main idea is contained in the first sentence. However, in the second example, if you just summarised the first sentence, you would say the main point is that American education does not meet high standards in certain basic skills. This is part of Ho's argument, but as you continue reading, you realize that his main point is in fact to show the advantages of the American educational system.
- Note that in both summaries, the details are left out (the sun rising, walking the dog, learning the Periodic Table by heart, etc.).

Summarizing fiction

- Here you will generally be summarising the plot of a work of fiction. When you start talking about what you think is the main point of the work, or the author's reason for writing it, or any aspect of analysis, then you are already on to your own opinion – that will be the heart of your essay. The summary is usually there just to help the reader by providing background information to make your argument or analysis understandable.

Summarising and Paraphrasing

- There are four important features in a plot summary:
 - It should be accurate.
 - It should be brief.
 - It should contain the most important details (main characters and key events), and only the most important details.
 - It should be in your own words.

Identifying a source

- Indicating the author and title
 - (The author) states in (this reading selection) that...
 - (The author), in (this reading selection), shows that...
 - In (this reading selection), (the author) writes that...
 - As (the author) says in (this reading selection), ...
 - The main idea of (the author's reading selection) is that...
- The first time you refer to an author, use the full name (first and last). After that, you can refer to him or her by surname only.
- Introducing an author's ideas: verbs

acknowledge	admit	advise	advocate	affirm
allude to	argue	ask	assert	assume
believe	bring to light	caution	claim	concede
concentrate on	conclude	condone	confess	contend
convey	declare	disclose	discuss	doubt
emphasize	endorse	establish	examine	explain
explore	expose	express	feel	find
focus on	give credence to	highlight	identify	illustrate
imply	indicate	insist	intimate	maintain
note	observe	point out	proclaim	propose
question	reason	recognize	recommend	remark
reveal	show	state	stress	suggest
think	uncover	underline	underscore	unveil
voice	write			

- Introducing an author's ideas: verb tense
 - It is conventional to use the present tense when summarising what an author has said. This acknowledges that the author's ideas continue to exist even through the author has finished writing about them.