

SUMMARIZING

FIVE KEYS TO WRITING EFFECTIVE SUMMARIES

An effective summary condenses a passage into a much shorter form, communicating only the essential facts of the original. Summarizing is not the same as paraphrasing, however: when you summarize something, you are not merely translating it word for word using synonyms and a thesaurus, but rather reworking the text into a condensed form for later reference. Effective summarizing is necessary to both research and writing, because it can save a lot of time and paper, and it will allow you to review your research quickly.

After reading articles during the research phase of your writing process, consider employing the following strategies:

1. Use summaries to communicate the main points of a text. In order to identify the main points, think of your summary as the lead paragraph in a newspaper article: it ought to answer the questions *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* in a general way: *Who* wrote the article; what the article concerns; where and *when* it takes place; why the author has written about it; and *how* the author communicates his or her ideas. In other words, don't include a lot of specific facts and data from the passage to be summarized unless you intend to cite them in your paper.
2. Use your own words. This will help you to understand the text better. Quotations should be employed sparingly, and only in instances where you need to communicate specific phrases used in the original. For example, you might quote words and phrases coined by the author, or sentences you intend to cite word-for-word in your paper.
3. Keep it short. Of course the length of a summary depends on what you're summarizing, but in general summaries should be a lot shorter than their originals, particularly when incorporated into a paper. Keep them short when doing research as well in order to make the most of your time.
4. Write objectively. Summaries should not report your opinion on the matter, but should accurately reflect the author's ideas and style. Nevertheless, make note of your evaluative comments and opinions outside of the summary because they may prove useful when writing your paper.
5. Document the publishing information for later reference. You will need it if you wish to cite your summarized research in papers. Otherwise, much of your research will come to nothing. Moreover, remember that paraphrases must be cited just as you would cite quotations. Anytime you present specific ideas that are neither your own nor general knowledge, you should include a citation for them.