

'Let's get on with it'



What is
SUMMARISING?

Summarising is the process of briefly re-counting the main ideas of someone else's writing in your own words, while omitting unimportant details.

Summarising guidelines

- Write your summary in continuous prose and not in note form.
- Ensure that the original points of the original text are included.
- Ensure that the main points of the original text are accurately interpreted.
- Your summary must not include additional material or opinions that are not in the original text.
- Use your own words to write your summary.
- Your summary must be brief (aim for half the length of the original text or less).

(Williamson, 2003)

Summarising Method

01 GET A GIST OF THE PASSAGE

Read until you thoroughly understand the passage. Then in your own words, write a brief statement of the main theme(s) of the passage.



For more information see the **Active Reading** and **Reading Textbooks** Study Guides

02 DETERMINE THE WRITER'S PURPOSE

Read through the passage again to determine the writer's point of view and purpose in writing. Note key words, phrases and sentences that indicate the 'feel' of the piece.

Hint: If you disagree with the factual contents of the passage, you must not query or comment on them in your summary, as it is not your job to alter or correct them in any way.

03 SKELETON OUTLINE—KEY POINTS OF MAIN THEME

Look for the key points that support your statement of the main theme of the passage. List the key points by underlining them or jotting them on rough paper.

04 MAKE A DETAILED PLAN OF YOUR SUMMARY

Base your plan on your list of key points. Use your own words and write this plan from your own notes without referring to the passage. A good summary plan is coherent and follows the original order.

05 WRITE A DRAFT OF YOUR SUMMARY

Stick to your plan and do not alter it as you go along. Use clear words and well-structured sentences to write your first draft.

06 REWORK YOUR DRAFT

Remove unnecessary words; overworked, wordy expressions; figurative language and illustrative examples; rhetorical questions and repetitions; colloquialisms or slang words; quotations or direct speech. Your summary should be about one-third or half the length of the original passage.

07 WRITE OUT THE FULL VERSION

Give your summary a heading and underline it. Then type or handwrite the final version of your summary.

Language of Summary

It is :

- **plain** because 'plain' words (and not illustrative examples, figures of speech, etc) are used to restate the essential meaning of a given passage.
- **clear** because a reader unfamiliar with the original passage must be able to grasp its essential meaning quickly, easily and accurately from the summary alone.

- **condensed** because there is a need to 'cram' a lot of meaning into very few words to make the summary brief.
- **correct** because errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling can cost you marks.
- **appropriate** and not riddled with colloquialisms, contractions, abbreviations and slang.
- **reported speech** because this is a report in writing of what was said and not direct speech which is a direct representation of words actually spoken.

Samples: 'good' and 'bad' summaries

Read the following passage labeled :'Original Passage'', followed by summaries labeled "Bad Summary" and "Good Summary".

After you understand what makes a concise, accurate summary, you will have some activities to practise on.

Original Passage

In the future, social historians will look back and be astonished at our almost obsessive concern with sufficient supplies of energy. Our planet is, after all, one vast system of energy. The sun's rays that fall on the roads of North America contain more energy than all the fossil fuel used each year in the whole world. The winds that rage and whisper round the planet are a vast energy reserve caused by unequal solar heating of blazing tropics and arctic poles. There is also energy locked up in plants. Indeed, in some developing lands, ninety per cent of the energy is derived from wood.

The fear of running out of energy must be said to have a social, not a rational base. Modern citizens simply do not see that their whole life is surrounded by a variety of energy reserves which not only exceed present sources, but have a further advantage that they are not exhausted by use. A ton of oil burnt is a ton lost: a ton of seaweed will be growing again next year. Even more reliably, the sun will rise and release an annual 1.5 quadrillion megawatt hours of energy. There can be no running out of such resources.

(240 words).

Sample 'bad' summary

[05]

Future historians will be [01 very surprised] by our constant worry about not having enough energy resources. Since the planet is a huge [02 reservoir of energy] of energy, [03 it is not reasonable] to be afraid of running out. There must be a social reason for our fears. People today do not see that there are many different sources of energy all around them and that these are not only greater than those now used, but they cannot be exhausted because [04 they grow again or they are permanent forces.]

(86 words)

- **01** badly chosen words—not strong enough as they do not give the right 'feel' of the original.
- **02** Wrong in this context as it seems to suggest that natural energy sources are all to do with water-power.
- 03** 'Loose' expression, full of wasted words. ←
- 04** Ambiguous and contains loose words too. ←
- 05** No title. ←

Sample 'good' summary

The Earth's Untapped and Renewable Energy Resources

Our besetting anxiety about energy supplies will [01 astonish] future social historians. Since Earth is itself a huge [02 energy system], our [03 fear that our supplies may fail is not reasonable.] Its cause is social. People today are blind to the fact that all around them are different kinds of energy, far greater than those now used. These natural sources of energy can never fail, for [04 they are renewable and, therefore, inexhaustible.]

(70 words)

→01 Better alternatives to 01, 02, 03, 04 from the sample 'bad' summary in page 2.

02 Title ←



Activity 1

Read the text below and identify the keypoints, then write a summary of the text.

Finding Extra Time

Students can benefit from using small amounts of time for study purposes. There are lots of small amounts of time people overlook, such as travelling to and from university, or between classes. While these times can sometimes be used to relax and to 'switch off', they can also be used more actively, to read a chapter, solve a problem or revise for a test. These short study sessions are particularly useful for busy students.



Answers

Busy students often overlook small amounts of time that can be actively used for study purposes.

Keypoints:
01 Use small amounts of time for study
02 Small amounts of time are often overlooked
03 This time can be used actively
04 Useful for busy students



Activity 2

Read the text below, then identify the summary most appropriate for it from a list of summaries.

Tertiary Learning

Studying in a new environment is different and therefore can be stressful. Tertiary students come from a variety of backgrounds and are studying for different purposes. Students may have come straight from secondary school, they may be 'mature age' students who have decided to pursue other careers or they may be international students and have just arrived in the country. Whatever their background, though, tertiary learning is different from their previous studies. Students may be worried about the amount of reading required, or whether they will be able to study efficiently enough to get through their exams. They may also worry about the tertiary learning expectations and requirements.

List of Summaries

- 01 Students from different backgrounds, including secondary, mature age and internationals, are concerned about the amount of reading in tertiary study.
- 02 Tertiary learning is often a new environment for students particularly internationals as they are unsure of what is expected of them.
- 03 For many students, including those from diverse backgrounds, it is often difficult to adapt to new tertiary learning environments. Managing workloads, understanding expectations and how to study effectively for exams can be extremely stressful.



Answer

ΣΟ ΛΥΣΕΙΣ



Activity 3

Rewrite the following in condensed language.

- 01 The popular press is full of crime stories, violence in the streets, scandals, thefts and horrifying incidents of every kind.
- 02 She made a list of things she needed such as butter, cheese, raisins, salt, sugar, flour and frozen foods.
- 03 The ship was crowded with people who were leaving their native land for a new home.
- 04 Rosi decided to train as a teacher of spinning, weaving, basket-making, china-painting and similar skills.
- 05 We tried in vain to persuade the conflicting parties to agree to submit their respective cases to the decision of an independent umpire.



Answers

- 01 The press is full of sensational items.
- 02 She made a list of groceries she needed.
- 03 The ship was crowded with emigrants.
- 04 Rosi decided to train as a handicraft teacher.
- 05 We failed to persuade the adversaries to go to arbitration.