

Writing Skill: Summary

Now that your planning stage is complete, you can begin writing your draft. Your writing should be organized, developed, accurate, and original.

Summary

Writing a summary is a very important academic skill. When you write a summary, you explain the most important parts of something you read or listened to with your own words.

Read the example paragraph and the summary of the example paragraph. Notice that the summary is much shorter and only talks about the major ideas from the paragraph.

Example: Paragraph

Many students who study and work have to balance their schedules carefully. They have to make time to go to class, go to work, and also complete their homework. If they don't plan their time carefully, they may not be able to meet these obligations and then they will face serious consequences. They may lose money by not making time for work or they may get bad grades in their classes by not having time to study. After these obligations are met, there are other activities many students enjoy like spending time with friends, doing hobbies, or dating. They will not have time for these extra activities without balancing their schedules first. It can be very difficult for students to make time for all of their obligations, but it is essential to their success.

An effective summary:

- explains the **most important parts** of the original.
- is written in **your own words**.
- keeps the **original** meaning.
- does **not** merely "cut" and "copy" from the original.
- is **shorter** than the original

Here is an overview of some simple steps you can follow in order to create a summary:

1. Determine your purpose
2. Read or listen to what you will summarize
3. Make a list of the main points
4. Write the summary
5. Compare the summary to the original.

Determine your purpose

The purpose of your summary will help you determine which details you should include. Typically, your summaries for academic writing have a similar purpose: you need to explain academic information.

Read/listen

Read or listen carefully so you understand the source well enough to summarize it.

Make a list of the main points

As you read/listen, pay attention to the main ideas and major details of the source material. You should make a list of these main points either while you read/listen or just after. If you can write on the text (or your notes), it may help to underline main points or cross out minor details. As you write your list, focus on ideas rather than copying the exact words from the source. Compare the example paragraph and the example list below.

Example: Paragraph

Many students who study and work have to balance their schedules carefully. They have to make time to go to class, go to work, and also complete their homework. If they don't plan their time carefully, they may not be able to meet these obligations and then they will face serious consequences. They may lose money by not making time for work or they may get bad grades in their classes by not having time to study. After these obligations are met, there are other activities many students enjoy like spending time with friends, doing hobbies, or dating. They will not have time for these extra activities without balancing their schedules first. It can be very difficult for students to make time for all of their obligations, but it is essential to their success.

Example: List

- Students who work need to balance their schedules
- They need time for work, class, homework
- Not planning can cause problems
- They won't have time for other activities if they don't plan carefully

Write the summary

Without looking at/listening to the original, use your list to write your summary. Again, it is important to focus on the ideas. Use your own words.

Example: List

- Students who work need to balance their schedules
- They need time for work, class, homework
- Not planning can cause problems
- They won't have time for other activities if they don't plan carefully

Example: Summary

In order to avoid problems that come from not meeting their work and school obligations and be able to participate in other activities, working students need to plan their time wisely.

Notice how the items on the list are not just copied and pasted together into one big sentence. The ideas are connected together carefully.

students who work	-->	working students
not planning can cause problems	-->	in order to avoid problems
have time for	-->	be able to participate in

Compare to the original

Make sure that you have not changed the meaning of the ideas.

Exercises

Exercise 1: Analyze introduction paragraphs

As you draft your introduction, review the information in the chapter "The Writing Process" about writing introduction paragraphs. You should start generally but not too generally. If you start too generally, you may fail to clearly describe the problem. Read the introduction and the revised introduction below and compare them. Why is the revised introduction more effective?

Introduction

There are many new experiences for international students in the United States, and some of them cause a lot of anxiety. Arranging finances, housing, and legal papers in another language are some examples. However, those experiences are not typically ongoing; once the arrangements are made, they are usually stable for at least a semester. Other stressful experiences are repeated on a daily basis, like having a conversation with a native speaker of English. Many international students avoid these conversations, but that is a serious problem for them. Knowledge and preparation can help international students participate actively in conversations rather than avoiding them.

Revised introduction

Conversations happen everywhere: work, school, church, stores, dates, and even the gym. Conversations are such a common part of daily life that people often don't think about how difficult they can be, or the anxiety they can cause, if all of these conversations are happening in another language. Many international students avoid participating in conversations, especially with native speakers of English. This avoidance is a serious problem for international students who study English because participating in conversations is crucial for developing their language skills. Avoiding conversations can also cause international students to struggle making friends and make them feel more isolated. While it is natural to feel nervous about participating in conversations, international students need to find ways to be more confident in their ability to participate in a conversation. International students can choose from various solutions to stop avoiding conversations and feel more confident.

Exercise 2: Evaluate summaries

Evaluate the summaries. Which summary is most effective for each original paragraph?

1. Original: The equipment is the first major difference between American football and soccer. In American football, the players need to wear protective clothing because it can be a dangerous game to play. The players need to wear helmets to protect their head, mouth guards for their teeth, and large pads for their shoulders and back. The players use a brown ball that is pointed on the ends. On the other hand, soccer players do not need to wear helmets and lots of protective pads. The players just have pads to protect their shins, and the goalie wears gloves. The ball they use in soccer is round. The ball is usually a bright color like white. Soccer and American football definitely require different equipment to play them.

- Summary #1: American football and soccer have different clothing, which is the biggest difference between the two sports when people play them.
- Summary #2: The equipment is different.
- Summary #3: American football and soccer are different due to the equipment required to play each one, namely the protective clothing (helmets and pads) and the ball that is used to play.

2. Original: Exercise is important because it improves your mental health. First, exercise is the healthiest way to deal with stress. When we have too much stress, our mental and emotional health is affected negatively. Exercise can reduce this impact. Exercise can also influence the balance of chemicals we have inside our bodies. Exercise releases endorphins into our bodies and that can help us feel better or not be depressed. These emotional benefits are very helpful. Exercise also helps us think more clearly because it brings more oxygen to the brain. If you watch how you feel when you exercise, you will notice that your mood and mental clarity improve.

- Summary #1: Exercise improves your mental health.
- Summary #2: Due to mental health benefits like reducing stress, balancing chemicals, releasing endorphins, and helping us think more clearly, exercise is essential.
- Summary #3: Exercise improves your mental health. First, exercise is the healthiest way to deal with stress. Exercise can also influence our chemical balance. Exercise also helps us think more clearly because it brings more oxygen to the brain.
- Summary #4: Exercise is important because your mental health is more important than your physical health and exercise is effective at improving your mental health.

Exercise 3: Identify major ideas

Identify the details or examples that are not major ideas. Be prepared to explain your choices.

Dinner groups are a great solution for people who hate to cook for themselves. A dinner group is a group of friends that decides to eat dinner together every night. The job of being the cook rotates every day that the group meets for dinner. Most college dinner groups meet Monday through Thursday, to allow group members time on the weekends to go on dates and visit friends. If there are four people, everyone cooks dinner one day each week from Monday to Thursday. If you are only in charge of cooking one meal each week, you can simply go to someone's house on the other days each week and not need to spend time cooking. Dinner groups allow busy students to eat healthy meals every night, but only cook once a week. This is an excellent way to eat healthier and maybe even make a new friend.

Exercise 4: Evaluate and revise a summary

Read the original paragraph and the summary.

Original:

Getting married in the United States often involves many different types of parties. Some couples have an engagement party, which is for family and friends to express congratulations to the couple after they get engaged. The bride typically is invited to a bridal shower, which is a party for all of her friends (usually only female friends) to celebrate the upcoming wedding with her. After the wedding ceremony, there is usually a wedding reception, which is another large party. The wedding reception includes many traditional activities, like cutting the cake and throwing the bouquet. All of these different parties are part of many American weddings.

Summary:

Getting married in the United States has many different events, such as engagement parties for some people where friends and family congratulate the couple and a wedding reception which is a party where there are many traditional things like throwing the bouquet to find the next bride and cutting the cake for the bride and the groom; then the couple is very tired!

Evaluate the summary based on the following criteria:

- explains the most important parts of the original.
- is written in your own words.
- keeps the original meaning.
- does not merely "cut" and "copy" from the original.
- is shorter than the original.

Revise the summary on a piece of paper.

Exercise 5: Write a summary.

Choose a paragraph to summarize. Write your summary on a piece of paper.

#1: Serving others

Serving others can help make people happier in any situation. When people are feeling stressed or unhappy, it is often because they are focused on their problems and worries. Focusing on our own problems and worries makes us feel more stressed about them. When we focus on helping other people with their problems, we feel happier because we are not focused on ourselves. Helping others also helps in the other areas of building happiness: it strengthens our relationships with others and it helps us feel more gratitude. When we serve others, we can become good friends with the people we help because they see how much we care about them. We feel more gratitude because we see the problems other people face and we realize that we are not the only ones who struggle with certain problems. Serving others is an essential key to living a happier life.

#2: Online classes

Online classes, on the other hand, do not offer face-to-face interaction and they are more limited in their instruction methods, yet they offer greater flexibility for scheduling. The interaction between teachers and students in an online class is typically time-delayed, meaning that students send an email and wait for a response. Interaction with classmates is less personal than it would be in a traditional class because when student-to-student interaction is required, it is typically limited to email or an online discussion board. The method of instruction in online classes is typically limited to videos and reading articles that can be sent to students electronically. Many of the hands-on experiences that students get in a traditional class are virtually impossible to have in an online class. Rather than being able to touch and feel rocks in the geology class, students will be limited to videos or pictures of rocks. The scheduling is very flexible. Students typically enroll in online classes because they need the ability to take classes at night, early in the morning, or even during their lunch break at work. The pace of online classes is typically determined by the students, so their personal and work schedules do not need to be completely changed. While the interaction and instruction may be limitations of an online class, the scheduling is very flexible.



This content is provided to you freely by BYU Open Learning Network.

Access it online or download it at https://open.byu.edu/academic_a_writing/writingHj.

