

Summarizing

Summaries omit the detail, and focus on the core, most important points in a longer piece of information. They are top-down, birds-eye views, and are used in all aspects of our lives.

When studying, summarizing is important for note-taking, for the same reasons as paraphrasing - it helps link new information to existing information, and cements the most important information in our thoughts. Being able to summarize lengthy articles or papers and link them together provides the best background or base for a research report.

By learning how to summarize, we are also training ourselves to recognize important information quickly. This is especially useful and time-saving when skimming articles, papers, or websites for information that is required to solve a problem.

In the workplace, being able to summarize can save time, when checking your understanding of a task, describing a problem, preparing reports, or recommending solutions to problems. Meetings run faster, and documents are concise and clear.

We summarize for our families and friends all the time - instead of explaining every single detail of a trip recently taken or a movie recently seen, we choose to explain only the highlights. Or when giving directions, we explain only the most important decision points (not every street lamp or graffitied wall).

One person's summary will never be the same as another's, as each individual has their own ideas of what information is most important.

Tips for summarizing

Dos:

- Use your own words.
- Only note the most important points, using key words and phrases.
- Read the original text multiple times, ensuring you don't miss any critical points.
- Ensure a summary is much shorter than the original source (usually 30% of the original size).
- In a written document, include the original source in the references at the end.
- Read widely and try to develop a summary of the article/book in your head as you read.

Don'ts:

- Don't include unnecessary details, examples or supporting information.
- Don't include your own opinions or thoughts.
- Don't repeat phrases word for word - this is plagiarism.

Paraphrasing

Describing information that you have read or heard using **your own words** is paraphrasing. When a text has been well paraphrased, all of the details in the original text should be retained and should have the same meaning. It is much longer than a summary, which contains only the most important information.

Tips for paraphrasing

Dos:

- use your own words, synonyms or synonym phrases.
- change the order of the information, change the grammar and sentence structure.
- keep the meaning, as well as the emphasis on and relationships between main and supporting points the same.
- reference the original text when paraphrasing written material.

Don'ts:

- repeat the information word for word, or change a word here and there, leaving most of the text and the sentence order the same - this is plagiarism.
- add your own opinions or thoughts - the information should be the same as in the original source.

Combining summarizing and paraphrasing

Summarizing and paraphrasing both help with language acquisition, linking words and phrases together and improving retention of new vocabulary.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is one of the biggest problems in essay writing today. Plagiarism means copying entire sentences, texts and even ideas from other people's work, textbooks or the Internet. Although repeating word for word has been and continues to be a technique very much in use in Spanish schools and universities – sometimes the only way to pass is repeating the teacher's ideas like a parrot -, it is viewed as a serious "infraction" in most education systems nowadays. In fact, it is now common to see politicians who lose their posts for having plagiarised work in their PhD or Masters. Remember it is fairly easy to detect plagiarised work, especially for a trained teacher.

To avoid plagiarism, try to follow the above tips on paraphrasing, and always acknowledge your sources mentioning them at the end of the document.

Adapted from: Kymberly Fergusson's <https://owlcation.com/academia/Learn-to-summarize-and-paraphrase>