

# Summary Writing

**Paraphrasing:** Using your own words to report someone else's writing, but maintaining an academic style.

**Summarizing:** Giving a **brief** account of the **main points of** some writing.

**Note:** In both cases it will be necessary to look for **topic sentences** and **keywords** in the original texts (the main information).

A **summary** is a condensation of the main ideas in an article or in a section of someone else's writing. A summary may stand alone, for example as a similar piece of writing to an abstract. Or it may simply form a section within a longer piece of your writing.

The aim of a summary is to give your readers a clear, objective, accurate and balanced account of an article they may, or may not, have not read, and to put it into the context of your own work.

**Summarising** therefore is a skill that involves **picking out** the key ideas in someone else's writing and **linking** them up in your own words.

## What is the difference between summarising and paraphrasing?

There are clear similarities between the two since both involve the re-writing of an author's ideas in your own words. However, the main differences are:

- a summary is likely to be shorter. Whereas paraphrasing may involve keeping more or less to the same length as the original, a summary could be the reduction of a long paragraph to a sentence, an article to a paragraph or a book to a page.
- a summary will keep to the structure and content of the original more closely than a paraphrase. The latter is more likely to include your personal gloss or interpretation of the original; in a summary you should avoid adding extra information or ideas that are not actually in the text you have read.

## When is summary writing useful?

Apart from the need to summarise other writers' ideas at particular points when writing a research paper, the skill is valuable in these situations:

- ✓ when reviewing an article or book.
- ✓ when annotating a bibliography entry.
- ✓ when preparing an abstract

In addition, of course, it is useful to develop the skill by keeping summary 'note cards' on other works that you read. In particular, this will help you to avoid plagiarism, since by writing from notes you will be presenting information in your own words.

## Are there any guidelines for summary writing?

1. Read the whole of the original text quickly to gain an impression of its content and its relevance to your work
2. Highlight the main points as you read
3. Make notes of your own on these points
4. Put away the original and rewrite your notes in your own words in complete sentences
5. Begin your summary with a statement of the main idea at the start. Don't forget to include referencing of your source.
6. Using your notes, write out your subsidiary or supporting points in coherent, well-connected sentences
7. Re-read your work to check that you have included all the information that you need.

## Sample summary

The main points in the text below can be written in a shorter, summary form for inclusion in your own writing. Points about the summary:

- ❖ it is about one third of the length of the original (88 words, compared to 273 in the original).
- ❖ the number of sentences has been reduced from 16 to 4
- ❖ the information has been compressed into these 4 sentences by

- \* cutting out less important information, e.g. examples
- \* reducing a whole clause or sentence to a phrase
- \* by using more subordinate clauses
- \* linking ideas by simple use of commas

### **Original text**

Solar power is energy generated from the sun. Many electronic devices, such as watches and calculators, can use the sun's energy directly to provide the power they need. Light energy from the sun changes the electrical conducting properties of the silicon crystals, and a tiny electric current starts to flow. This system is called a solar cell. Although solar cells used on earth do not provide much power, satellites in space run on the same principle. They get many times more energy because they are closer to the sun. In the future, workers in space may build huge power stations from solar cells many kilometers wide. The electricity generated could be beamed down as microwaves and then converted back into electricity. Most of the solar power that we use today is based on a much simpler principle than the silicon solar cell. Solar panels on the roofs of houses heat water directly for bathing and central heating systems. The industrial version of the solar panel is the solar furnace, in which huge, curved solar panels, together with a system of mirrors, concentrate a large amount of solar energy onto a small area. The heat energy makes steam for generating electricity. Solar power is clean, renewable, non-polluting and does not damage the environment. It is potentially one of the more important sources of energy in the world. A major disadvantage of solar energy is that the amount of energy generated depends on the season, the part of the world and the weather on a particular day. Another disadvantage is that the raw materials for solar panels, such as glass and aluminium, are quite expensive.

*from* Dr Trisha Greenhalgh (1994) *Environment Today* Harlow, Longman

### **Sample summary**

Dr Greenhalgh explains how solar power works in two ways. Light from the sun can generate a tiny current in silicon crystals, creating a solar cell, which is used to run space satellites and in the future could provide electricity from space power stations. Solar panels, or the larger industrial solar furnace, generate heat directly through concentrating solar energy in a small

area. Solar power is renewable, non-polluting and potentially an important energy source, but its value is limited by weather, region and the cost of raw materials.

### **Points to check in your own writing**

- ✚ In my summary, is there a clear thesis statement (with the writer's main idea)?
- ✚ Does it give a reader who has not read the original a clear idea of what it said?
- ✚ Does it include the writer's other main supporting points? Have I cut out unnecessary

detail and examples?

- ✚ Does the finished summary have the same balance of ideas as the original text?
- ✚ Is it written in simpler language than the original?
- ✚ Do the ideas in the summary flow logically and in grammatically well-linked sentences?