

# How to Write Formal Summaries

- ❖ Read the selection carefully paying attention to the key words, phrases, and concepts.
- ❖ Look for all the main ideas and supporting information included in the original work.
- ❖ As you read, mark up the text underlining or notating as little as possible for the purpose of remembering as much as possible.
- ❖ Make sure you understand what the overall purpose/meaning of the text is before you begin to write.
- ❖ Organize the important information in a pre-writing format before writing the summary.
- ❖ Your summary must not include information or have judgments that are not in the text.
- ❖ Do not interpret or add details not found in the original text.
- ❖ When you write your summary, make sure you condense the text (about 1/3 to 1/4 the length of the original text).
- ❖ This must be written in third person only!
- ❖ Write a summary using only the facts and details from the original text:
  - The topic sentence should be a clear statement of the main idea of the original selection.
  - Add essential facts and details such as names, explanations, descriptions, dates, or places.
  - State each key point in ONE clear sentence.
  - Arrange ideas in the most logical order following the order of the original text.
  - End your summary with a concluding sentence that ties the ideas together.

## **Condensing**

(Shortening the text)

Eliminate redundancy

Eliminate information judged to be trivial

Collapse lists

Make generalizations

## **Integrating**

(Combining ideas from different sentences or paragraphs in a passage) Abstract and generalize information across a passage

## **Paraphrasing**

(Maintains ideas while restating them in the summary writer's own words) Identify important information Translate ideas into own words.

Zeke called on Monday. He called on Tuesday. He called *again on Wednesday*. He called on Thursday. *And he called on Friday. And each time his call went unanswered.*

*Zeke's daily calls went unanswered for five days.*

*The disease had spread to the point that people were using the word epidemic. There were 5 reported cases in New York, 4 cases in Chicago, 3 cases in San Francisco, 6 cases in Boston, 8 cases in Los Angeles, and 6 cases in Houston.*

*People were calling it an epidemic. There were multiple cases in each of six large cities.*

Sacramento County Office of Education Capita! Region *Professional* Development Center

## Handout for Selecting and Rewriting Information

---

Name:

Date:

Period:

<b>One way to say this:</b>	<b>Another way is:</b>
<p>Today, people celebrate a day for foolishness in India. People in Scotland celebrate foolishness with jokes. In France, they celebrate the day too. And in the United States, jokes and tricks are popular on April Fool's Day.</p>	
<p>Sometimes biting winds blow during winter storms. Sometimes there are ice storms. Sometimes it is bitterly cold.</p>	
<p>Birds move their wings forward and down. They also move them up and back. This is how they fly.</p>	
<p>In 1850, thousands of people were rushing to California in search of gold. They came by ship. They came on horseback. They came on foot. And some came by wagon.</p>	
<p>Molly's mind drifted to the pen. She remembered how it felt in her hand. She remembered how the smooth gold point glided across the paper. She remembered how words just seemed to fall into place when she wrote with mat pen.</p>	
<p>At the rock shop, Mr. Bums showed Desmond lots of rocks and fossils. Some of the rocks were different colors. Some of the rocks were different sizes. Some were different shapes.</p>	
<p>Some species seem to be covered with bark. Others have lumps that look like buds. When they play dead, they look like twigs. And they can change colors with the seasons, like leaves.</p>	
<p>A friend came to help clean up. Terry came over to help hang paintings. Andre came to help hang paintings too. Chris and Marcia came to help set up chairs.</p>	

## Criteria for Formal Summaries

A good summary should condense the original text (i.e., it should be shorter). How short is short enough? It should be long enough to include the most important information (see below). A rough rule of thumb for passages of 1 - 3 pages is that a summary should be about 1/3 to 1/4 the length of the original text. For some texts, the appropriate length of a summary depends on why it is being written (i.e., what it will be used for), as well as on the length of the original text.

A good summary should include only the most important information. But what information is the most important? In any passage, some information is going to be more important than other information. When trying to determine which information to include, the summary writer might ask "Is this piece of information necessary for the summary reader to know what the original passage was about?"

A good summary should reflect only what is in the passage. A summary comes directly from the text; it reflects only the point of view and information from the text and does not go beyond the text. For example, what you write in your summary should not include other information you know about the topic nor should it include your opinions about the information in the passage.

A good summary should be written in your own words. This means that the summary is not copied directly/ from the text. The same ideas are conveyed, but you have translated these into your own way of saying them. This often results in the text being condensed, as well.

A good summary should be well written. This means, very simply, that the summary follows the rules of good writing (e.g., spelling, word usage, punctuation, sentence construction, and organization).

## Summary Writing Conventions

Avoid questions. Most of the time using questions in a summary will be less direct and less efficient than some other way of presenting the information. Questions tend to make an idea longer, rather than shorter, and they often mean the summary reader has to figure out what was in the original text. There will be exceptions, but you have to ask yourself how well questions communicate the information from the passage.

Avoid the first person (e.g., the word I) in your summary. Narrative prose (a story) is best summarized when the summary is written in the third person. Even if a narrative is written in the first person, the summary should be written in the third person. The experiences of the characters in the story are not your *experiences* and should not be presented as though they were.

Avoid dialogue. Dialogue is usually not an effective way to summarize a narrative. There may be times when you cannot avoid using dialogue or when it is the best way to convey the contents of the passage. But, in general, it should be avoided.

Begin with information from the passage, *not* with an introductory statement such as "This passage is about" or "What I read in the passage was."

*Sacramento County Office of Education Capital Region Professional Development Center*

# Summary Writing Checklist

## Quick Check for the writer

Did you...

- \_\_\_\_\_ Read carefully to understand the main ideas of the passage?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Include all the main points or story elements from the original text?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Select the most important details to support the main idea?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Combine ideas that belong together and collapse lists into larger categories by generalizing?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Paraphrase or write the ideas that you included?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make sure you are telling what happened in the story and not writing from your own point of view or as if you were one of the characters?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Avoid inserting any information that was not in the original passage?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Avoid asking questions, using the first person "I", or using dialogue?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Arrange your ideas in the most logical order?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Use a concluding or ending sentence that ties your points together?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make your summary about the right length for summary purposes?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Edit for correct punctuation, capitalization and spelling?

## PASSAGE

### SNH

A blanket of fresh snow can brighten a winter landscape. But snow is more than just beautiful. It is helpful, too. Snow benefits plants, animals, and people in many ways.

Snow helps plants that stay in the ground all winter. It does not kill plants. It acts as a shield. Snow traps air beneath it. This air is warmer than the air above the snow. The warm air surrounds and protects plants. Biting winter winds cannot reach them. Ice storms and bitter cold cannot harm them. Plants stay alive through the worst weather.

Snow helps animals, too. Some animals nest below ground. They spend the whole winter there. A blanket of snow serves to keep the nests warm. Other animals do not nest below ground. They tunnel into the snow itself. They make nests there. Compared with the cold air above, snow nests are cozy.

Snow also benefits people. It helps many people earn a living. Some communities are centers for winter sports. Many visitors go there to ski. People who live and work in these communities need snow. Without it, they would have no business.

Snow is useful even when it melts. Melting snow runs into wells. It flows into rivers and streams. These supply water to towns and cities. Farms benefit from melting snow as well. Some areas are dry in summer. They get little rain. Nearly all their water comes from melted snow. The water is stored in dammed-up lakes and ponds. It is used during the growing season to water fields and orchards. Without this water supply, there could be no crops. In this way, the summer harvest depends on winter snow.

## Passage Breakdown

**Topic:**

**Essential Info:**

- 
- 
- 
- 

<b>Main Points:</b>	<b>Details/Support:</b>
1.	a. b. c.
2.	a. b. c.
3.	a. b. c.



## Passage Breakdown

**Topic:** The Benefits of Snow

**Essential Info:**

- Snow helps plants
- Snow helps animals
- Snow helps people
- Snow is useful

<b>Main Points:</b>	<b>Details/Support:</b>
1. Snow helps keep plants alive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Acts as a shield, traps warm air</li> <li>b. Biting winds can't kill plants</li> </ul>
2. Snow helps animals nest in the ground.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Stay in nest through the winter, snow blankets and keeps them warm</li> <li>b. Some animals tunnel in the snow.</li> </ul>
3. Snow helps people with jobs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. People earn a living in the snow.</li> <li>b. Winter sports attract people.</li> </ul>
4. Snow is useful to farms and Communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Supplies water to towns</li> <li>b. Water is stored in dammed-up ponds for farms</li> </ul>

(CS) Therefore, snow is useful to vegetation, wildlife, humans, and neighborhoods.

## Summary Example

(TS) A blanket of snow brightens a landscape, makes it beautiful, and is more because it helps plants, animals, and people. (1<sup>st</sup> pt.) Plants that stay in the ground do not die. (ex.) The snow traps air and is a shield, and the air is warmer under the snow. It surrounds the plant so ice storms cannot reach them. Since the biting winds of winter cannot get at them, they stay alive. (2<sup>nd</sup> pt.) In addition, snow helps animals when they nest in the ground, (ex.) Because the animals stay in their nests through the winter, the snow blanket keeps them warm in their snow nests. Plus, animals tunnel in the snow in the protection and warmth of the snow. (3<sup>rd</sup> pt.) Lastly, snow helps people, (ex.) It is there for people who like to ski, gives jobs to those who need to work in it, and makes other sports like hockey and ice skating possible. When the snow melts, it also helps to bring water to towns and tons being stored in dammed-up ponds. (CS) So, snow is more than just pretty to look at, it helps people and the environment.

Note: This is not a perfect example as there are several things wrong with it. Your job is to find those errors and fix them in a rewriting of this paragraph. Good luck and make sure you pay attention to the three parts, transitions, and use your “Summary Writing Checklist” to guide your rewrite.