

Summarising

Years 7–12 | Effective Study Strategy

WHAT IS SUMMARISING?

Summarising is the process of condensing material into a shorter, more essential form — in your own words. Effective summarising is not highlighting, copying, or paraphrasing sentence by sentence. It requires you to identify the most important ideas and restate them with understanding.

WHY DOES IT WORK? THE PSYCHOLOGY

- Summarising forces active processing — you must decide what is important and what is not.
- Translating ideas into your own words is a form of elaborative interrogation, strengthening encoding.
- Research shows summarising is significantly more effective than highlighting or re-reading.
- Writing a summary from memory (rather than from open notes) turns summarising into retrieval practice.

"A good summary is half the length of the original and twice as useful — because you had to understand it to write it."

RULES FOR EFFECTIVE SUMMARISING

- Never copy sentences word-for-word — paraphrase in your own language.
- No more than 1/3 of the original length.
- Start each summary sentence with "This means..." or "In other words..." to force genuine processing.
- After reading, close your notes and write the summary from memory.
- Check your summary against the original and add any missing key ideas.

SUMMARISING TEMPLATE

Text / chapter / topic being summarised:

Original length (approx):

My target summary length:

MY SUMMARY — Write from memory after reading (your own words only):

Key ideas I missed when I checked back against the original:

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Quality Check

Ask yourself: "Could someone who hadn't read the original understand the main ideas from my summary alone?" If yes — well done. If no — add more depth.