

Writing: Summarising

What is summarising?

To summarise is to write a shortened version of a longer text.

Why summarise?

- Writing summaries helps you to capture the main points of long texts and remember them better.
- You can use them to revise for exams as they take less time to read.
- You can use them to refer quickly to longer texts in your essays.

An example

The original passage

Time management is a critical skill for all students to develop. Weekly and semester timetables are an excellent way to plan a study programme. Students can use them to manage their most important study, work and social commitments and set themselves study goals. Blocks of time can then be set aside for study, reading, researching and writing. The most urgent tasks can be addressed, while work continues on preparing for lectures, tutorials and assignments. If time has been allocated for specific purposes, it is easier to avoid unexpected demands like phone calls, visitors and invitations. Assignments can be completed and submitted on time and to a satisfactory standard.

A possible summary

According to the author, effective time management allows students to manage their time and successfully complete their study requirements.

How to summarise

Step 1: Understand what you are reading. If you don't understand it, you can't summarise it correctly.

Step 2: Write down the main ideas in point form using keywords; this will make it easier to express them in your own words.

Step 3: Write the summary directly from your notes without re-reading the passage, using **your own words** whenever possible. As with paraphrasing, you must be careful not to plagiarise.

Step 4: Refer back to the original to ensure that your summary is a true reflection of the writer's ideas.

Some tips:

- Read the title if there is one, as this should tell you the focus of the text being summarised.
- When summarising a chapter or article, the introduction and conclusion should provide a good overview of the content. Look for the thesis statement.
- Topic sentences provide a quick outline of the main idea(s) presented in a paragraph. If the text has sections with headings and sub-headings, they can do the same.
- Look at any illustrations or diagrams in the text, as they may point you to the important ideas in the text.
- Record the original source (including the page number) so that you can provide a reference.

Adapted from SLC at RMIT,

http://www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/lisu/content/4_writingSkills/writing_tuts/summarising_LL/summary.html, and Learning Connection at UniSA,

<http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/learningconnection/student/learningAdvisors/summarise.asp>

Exercise 1

Read the original passage in the example on page 1, and choose **two** more acceptable summaries from the ones below.

- A. By setting study goals and specific tasks, learning to prioritise the most important and urgent tasks, using a timetable and minimising interruptions, students can learn to manage their time much more successfully.
- B. Students never succeed in their studies unless they use a daily, weekly and semester timetable. This is the only way to ensure their time is used profitably and their work is completed on time.
- C. To be a successful student you need to be able to manage your time. A good way to do this is to use a semester timetable. This will help to set goals, prioritise tasks and minimise interruptions in order to complete assignment work on time.

Exercise 2

Underline the key points of the passage below, and choose the best summary.

Studying in a new environment is different and therefore can be stressful. Tertiary students come from a variety of backgrounds and are studying for different purposes. Students may have come straight from secondary school, they may be 'mature age' students who have decided to pursue another career, or they may be international students and have just arrived in Singapore. Whatever their backgrounds though, tertiary learning is different from their previous studies. Students may be worried about the amount of reading required, or whether they will be able to study efficiently enough to get through their exams. They may also worry about the tertiary learning expectations and requirements.

- A. Students from different backgrounds, including secondary, mature age and international, are concerned about the amount of reading required in tertiary studies.
- B. Tertiary learning is often a new environment for students, particularly international students, as they are unsure of what is expected of them.
- C. For many students, including those from diverse backgrounds, it is often difficult to adapt to new tertiary learning environments. Managing workloads, understanding expectations and how to study effectively for exams can be extremely stressful.

Exercise 3

Underline the key points and write a **one**-sentence summary of the following paragraph.

Students can benefit from using small amounts of time for study purposes. There are lots of small amounts of time people overlook, such as travelling to and from school, or between classes. While these times can sometimes be used to relax and to “switch off”, they can also be used more actively; to read a chapter, solve a problem or revise for a test. These short study sessions are particularly useful for busy students.

*Adapted from SLC at RMIT,
http://www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/lisu/content/4_WritingSkills/writing_tuts/summarising_LL/example.html*

Exercise 4

Choose a passage of about 300 words from one of your subject textbooks or a newspaper. Copy out the paragraph and, below it, write an appropriate summary of no more than 60 words.

Summarising (answer key)

Exercise 1

A and C

Exercise 2

- Tertiary = new environment
- Students come from diverse backgrounds
- Tertiary study involves stress, e.g. managing workloads

C

Exercise 3 (suggested answer)

- small amounts of time for study purposes
- lots of small amounts of time people overlook
- used more actively
- useful for busy students

Busy students often fail to consider short periods of time that can be more usefully spent to study.