Summarising texts

Introduction

When providing evidence in your academic assignments, it is important to be able to present what you have read in your own words. As well as **paraphrasing** smaller parts of a text in order to highlight **definitions** or **details**, it is also important to be able to **summarise** the **key points** of **larger texts** in your own words.

Why is summarising important?

Summarising a text in your academic writing is important because it:

- provides evidence for your academic arguments, conclusions and evaluations
- gives an overview of the key points of a text
- shows your understanding of a text
- shows your awareness of the wider context of a topic or issue

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Paraphrasing or Summarising?

Both paraphrasing and summarising involve changing the original text to show your understanding of what you have read. However, they each have different features and focus on different aspects of a text.

Paraphrasing	Summarising
• Concentrates on a small part of a larger text	• Concentrates on a larger text
• Emphasises the key points of a part of a text	• Emphasises the key points of the whole text
• Includes a large amount of detail	• Includes a limited amount of detail

✓ **Remember: always reference your sources when paraphrasing as well as summarising**

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How do I summarise a text?

When summarising a text, follow the steps below:

1. **Read** and **understand** your **assignment brief** – highlight **key terms** that will help you understand what you need to look for in your reading

2. Read the whole text and highlight **key points** specifically related to **your assignment brief**

3. Take notes on the key points in your own words. You do not need to change **subject specific terminology** that is commonly used in your subject area or **specific names** e.g.: **study skills**; **The Faculty of Health and Social Sciences**

4. Check your notes against the original text to ensure you have kept the same meaning

5. Go back to your **assignment brief** and select the most **relevant** key points from your notes

6. Construct a **short text** (one or two sentences) in your own words, based on the **relevant key points** you selected from your notes. Remember to use an **academic style** of writing and include a **reference**.

Worked example:

On the following page is an example of how a part of a text could be **paraphrased** and how a text could be **summarised**, in order to highlight the differences between summarising and paraphrasing.

Original Text:

Empirical research was carried out at the University of Bedfordshire and investigated the impact of attending study skills classes parallel to subject courses. The classes were run as part of a pilot scheme aimed at enhancing students' academic skills and improving academic achievement. The programme for the classes was created through collaboration between academic skills tutors from the professional services department of the university and academic course tutors from the faculty of Health and Social Sciences. This was based on previous research indicating that study skills classes tend to be more effective in engaging students when they are specifically related to their field of study (Brown 2010; Cook 2011). The teaching of study skills was not embedded into the programme; rather students signed up to the classes voluntarily and texts used for reading and note-taking exercises were relevant to subjects covered within the core units of courses within the faculty. Four classes were run each week with a capacity of thirty students per class with a steady rate of attendance throughout. Overall, the results of student questionnaires and interviews indicated a high rate of student satisfaction. Likewise, academic course tutors reported an improvement in a high proportion of students' academic writing.

Jones, K. (2012) *Implementing Study Skills Teaching in a Higher Education Setting*. Luton: University of Bedfordshire Press

Paraphrased example:

Jones (2012) reported that, at the University of Bedfordshire, academic skills tutors and academic course tutors from The Faculty of Health and Social Sciences collaborated to design and implement a study skills course to be run on a weekly basis. The course was based on the subject-specific needs of students and took into account topics being covered in core units across the faculty in order to facilitate the engagement of students on the course.

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Note:

- Focus is on a **part** of the original text

- Describes in detail

- Words in <mark style="background-color: yellow">yellow</mark> have been changed from the original text in order to show understanding of the issues/topics being discussed

  Words in <mark style="background-color: cyan">blue</mark> have not been changed from the original text because they are **names** or **subject-specific terms**

- Meaning has not been changed

- Similar in length to the original part of the text

- Can be used to highlight how a specific part of research has been carried out or to explain a definition of a theme or framework

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Summarised example:

Jones (2012) researched the introduction of study skills classes within the faculty of Health and Social Sciences at the University of Bedfordshire and found that this seemed to have a positive effect on academic achievement

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Note:

- Focuses on the main/key points of the **whole** text: what happened? Where? What was found?

- Shorter than the original text

- Meaning has not been changed

- Does not describe in detail

- Can be used to show a range of research carried out or a number of perspectives on a specific issue/topic

Further information

The Learning Resources Study Hub provides a range of opportunities (such as workshops and drop-ins) for you to enhance your academic skills. For more information visit: **lrweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub**

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