



Summarizing

Definition

Buckley (2004), in her popular writing text *Fit to Print*, defines summarizing as reducing text to one-third or one-quarter its original size, clearly articulating the author's meaning, and retaining main ideas. Diane Hacker (2008), in *A Canadian Writer's Reference*, explains that summarizing involves stating a work's thesis and main ideas "simply, briefly, and accurately" (p. 62).

Purpose

The purpose of summarizing is to briefly present the key points of a theory or work in order to provide context for your argument/thesis.

Process

- Read the work first to understand the author's intent. This is a crucial step because an incomplete reading could lead to an inaccurate summary. **Note:** an inaccurate summary is plagiarism!
- In your own words, write the thesis and main ideas in point form.
- Decide which points are crucial to an accurate summary of the author's work. It is very important that the summary does not misrepresent the author's argument.
- Edit the summary by deleting extraneous descriptors, details, and examples.
- Reread the original work to ensure that you have accurately represented the main ideas in your summary.
- Opposite to solid essay writing, the goal is to be brief and general rather than supporting all statements with facts, examples, or other details.

When summarizing is useful

Summarizing is useful in many types of writing and at different points in the writing process. Summarizing is used to support an argument, provide context for a paper's thesis, write literature reviews, and annotate a bibliography. The benefit of summarizing lies in showing the "big picture," which allows the reader to contextualize what you are saying. In addition to the advantages of summarizing for the reader, as a writer you gain a better sense of where you are going with your writing, which parts need elaboration, and whether you have comprehended the information you have collected.

You can summarize:

- results of studies you are reporting on
- methods or approaches others have taken in an area you are describing
- various researchers'/authors' viewpoints on given issues

- points you have made in an essay at any juncture or in a conclusion
- contents of a text you are reviewing
- issues peripheral to your paper but necessary for providing the context for your writing
- historical events leading to the event/issue/philosophy you are discussing.

References

Buckley, J. (2004). *Fit to Print: The Canadian Student's Guide to Essay Writing*. (6th ed.) Toronto: Nelson.

Hacker, D. (2008). *A Canadian Writer's Reference*. (4th ed.) Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.