

Rules for Writing Summaries

A **summary** reduces a long text to a shorter one by condensing the main ideas and skipping the details. For example, an “executive summary” may be a one or two page document that condenses a much longer piece of information into a form readable in a few minutes. A “book report” (as opposed to a “book review”) summarizes the main plot, theme, and characters of a book. The following are a few guidelines for writing summaries.

1. Keep your primary objective in mind—to reproduce faithfully the main ideas of a longer document, skipping the details.
2. Be accurate and brief. Condense paragraphs to sentences, sentences to phrases, and skip sections that you judge redundant or unnecessary. (Do not, however, reduce the piece to an outline that only you can understand.)
3. Write in your clearest style. A summary is about information; it is more important to be clear than to be true to the style of the original document.
4. Follow the organizational pattern of the original. If the original has subheadings or numbered points, use them as guides for writing your condensation.
5. Maintain the tone of the original as best you can. If the source is witty, be witty. If the source is formal, be formal.