

Summarising

This resource will help you recognise the importance of summarising and describe how summarising habits relate to smart studying, ethical conduct and effective communication.

WHAT IS SUMMARISING?

To summarise is simply to identify the most important information from a text. You're probably summarising every day without thinking about it. A summary is always much shorter than the original text, but there is more to summarising than simply copying some sentences from a source and leaving out others. Summarising is a matter of analysing and re-purposing information.

What is to be taken in summary from a text depends on the type of text being summarised and the new purpose to which information is to be put. An argument, for example, would be summarised into a thesis statement and a few key points, leaving out all the explanation and detailed evidence. A research report would be summarised into the motivating problem or driving question, the type of method and the findings of greatest significance, leaving out all the descriptive and explanatory details and raw data (exactly what an abstract does for a journal article).

The introduction to every academic text you read (and write) should provide the reader with a summarising preview of what is to come, rather than just throw the reader into the detail.

Why summarise?

Writing a summary is useful because in the act of identifying what is important, you're analysing and evaluating information, and forming memories of what you're reading or hearing – which is half the job of studying for an exam. Having an accurate and short record of what you've read or heard is also a useful source of 'digested' information for use when you need to generate a new text that involves re-presenting others' ideas.

Like so many things, the more you do it, the better at it you become.

HOW DO I SUMMARISE?

You can summarise a text in many different ways, depending on which idea or concept from the original text you want to use for your own purposes.

In the summaries below, there are several things to notice:

- The original text can be shortened a little or a lot. A summary could be a simple selection of key sentences without changing them, but to be most useful as a learning strategy, summarising usually involves identifying the key words of the original text.
- The topic of the message can be changed by starting with a different element. Conciseness can be achieved by choosing words that in themselves summarise larger chunks of information.

Example 1

Original text (from Spiro 2013)

“One of the considerations that is all too often ignored in discussions of tax policy is the way it affects the underground economy. Theoretical tax models almost always assume that everybody follows the rules. In reality, the behavioural response to tax changes has a wider range of variation than the choice between labour and leisure. Many otherwise honest citizens are prepared to break the law in order to evade taxes. Once the underground economy is taken into account – in effect, the proposition that individuals may decide to “opt out” of the tax system – there is a whole new layer of complexity to tax policy. Taxes that may seem to be optimal without the underground economy may no longer be optimal once it is taken into consideration.”

Summaries

1. Theoretical tax models should not overlook the effect of the underground economy on tax policy. As responses to tax changes vary between individuals, many are ready to commit tax crimes when faced with such changes (Spiro 2013).
2. Even honest citizens are prepared to evade taxes when faced with changes in tax policy (Spiro 2013).

FURTHER RESOURCES



Note-taking

Concept mapping

Paraphrasing

REFERENCES

Spiro, P 2013, 'Tax Policy and the Underground Economy', in C Bajada & F Schneider (eds.), *The Shadow Economy: An International Survey*, 2nd edn, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.



