

Summaries

A summary is a short, concise restatement of the main points made in a text.

What to do when summarising:

It can be

- In point form
- In continuous prose
- Adapted to fit into a specific genre or register

Summaries are useful for:

- Studying (how often do you make point-form summaries?)
- Recounting, i.e. telling someone about something
- Clarifying ideas in your mind
- Finding and setting out key ideas in books, journals, articles, textbooks, etc

Where do we find summaries?

- in newspapers (headlines, reporting the news, the editorial leader column);
- in reports, both formal and informal;
- in book blurbs;
- in film theatre, and book reviews;
- in instructions
- in telegrams and postcards

How do we go about summarising?

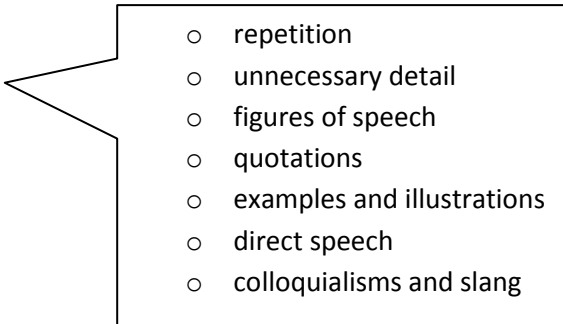
- Read the **instructions** as they will inform you as to the form your summary must; take (e.g. flow chart, graph, prose form, point form).
- Take note of whether or not **full sentences** are required (in that case ensure that you have a *finite verb* in each sentence;
- **Read the passage** several times;
- **Highlight the topic sentences** or key sentences;
- Give your summary **a title** if one has not been provided. This will

- assist you to focus on the main ideas;
- Write down a list of **main ideas**;
- Using your list of **key points**, write **a rough draft**;
- **Edit** and *polish* your summary;
- Check the **number of words**
 - Too many words probably indicates that you included **unnecessary detail**
 - **Too few words** probably indicate that you have omitted some important points.
 - Provide a *word count* in brackets at the end of your summary.

- **Reread the original** to check that you have included the *main ideas*.

Tips:

- Express yourself in **plain, easily understood** language.
- Use the **third person** (he or she) even if the passage has been written in the first person. (I)
- Remember to eliminate:

- 
- repetition
 - unnecessary detail
 - figures of speech
 - quotations
 - examples and illustrations
 - direct speech
 - colloquialisms and slang

- Make sure that your summary is **logical**.
- **Simplify and condense**. Change *phrases* into *single words*, and *clauses* into *phrases*. Look at these examples:

- When the film show finished, they went to an Italian restaurant and had a tasty, satisfying meal of a starter, pasta as the main meal, and Italian kisses as a dessert.

After the film, they had a satisfying meal in an Italian restaurant.

- In a lengthy statement Mr Seletse indicated that his job involved a great deal of hard and laborious work that he found very difficult.

Mr Seletse said that his job was hard and difficult.

- Write only **7 words on a line** when you do your draft. This will help you **to count** the number of words.

N.B.

Sometimes you will be required to **shift register** i.e. move from one register to another.

In **other cases** you may be told to maintain the **existing style** of writing.

THE WORD COUNT IS VERY IMPORTANT! Do not exceed it by more than one or two words or you will be severely penalised. Include a word count at the bottom of your page. Too few words will compromise the content of your summary.

Practice 1

Traditionally, teachers have been respected. Reasons for this are that they are older than their pupils, know more than most others, and have been traditionally trained. Their role is important: preparing the young for a place in society.

Give **three words** that state the reasons why teachers must be respected.

Practice 2

Mary Lou had to explain to her husband why she sold her violin. List the five points she would have used to explain what she did. Your summary should be a maximum of 60 words in length.

1. Now here I was with the newspaper 'wanted' advertisements. I forced my thoughts to the present and read again the advertisement that had transported me back to my childhood memories. 'Wanted – violin. Can't pay much. Call ...' Laying aside the paper, I murmured, 'I must find my violin.'
2. Eventually I discovered the case deep in a corner of the cupboard. Opening the lid, I lifted the violin from its rose-velvet lining. My fingers caressed its golden wood. I tuned the strings, miraculously still intact, tightened the bow and put resin on the dry horsehairs.
3. And then my violin began to sing again to the favourite tunes that had never left my memory. How long I played, I shall never know. I thought of Daddy who did all he could to fill my needs and desires when I was a little girl. I wondered if I had ever thanked him.
4. At last I laid the violin back in its case, I picked up the newspaper, walked to the phone and dialled. Later in the day, an old car stopped in my driveway. A man in his thirties knocked on the door. 'I've been praying someone would answer my advertisement.'
My daughter wants a violin so badly,' he said, examining the instrument.
'How much are you asking?'
I heard my voice answer, 'Seven dollars.'
'Are you sure?' he asked, reminding me so much of Daddy.
'Seven dollars,' I repeated, and then added, 'I hope your little girl will enjoy it as much as I did.'
5. I closed the door behind him. Peeking out between the curtains, I saw his wife and children waiting in the car. A door suddenly opened and a young girl ran to him as he held out the violin case to her. She hugged it against her, then dropped to her knees and snapped open the case. She touched the violin lightly as it caught the glow of the late-afternoon sun, then turned to throw her arms around her smiling father.

(Adapted from an article by Mary Lou Klingler in *Reader's Digest*)

5 words:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Practice 3

You represented your school at a recent conference on journalism. You heard Barbara Ehrenreich give the speech of which the passage below is a transcript. Your English teacher has asked you for a summary of the speech.

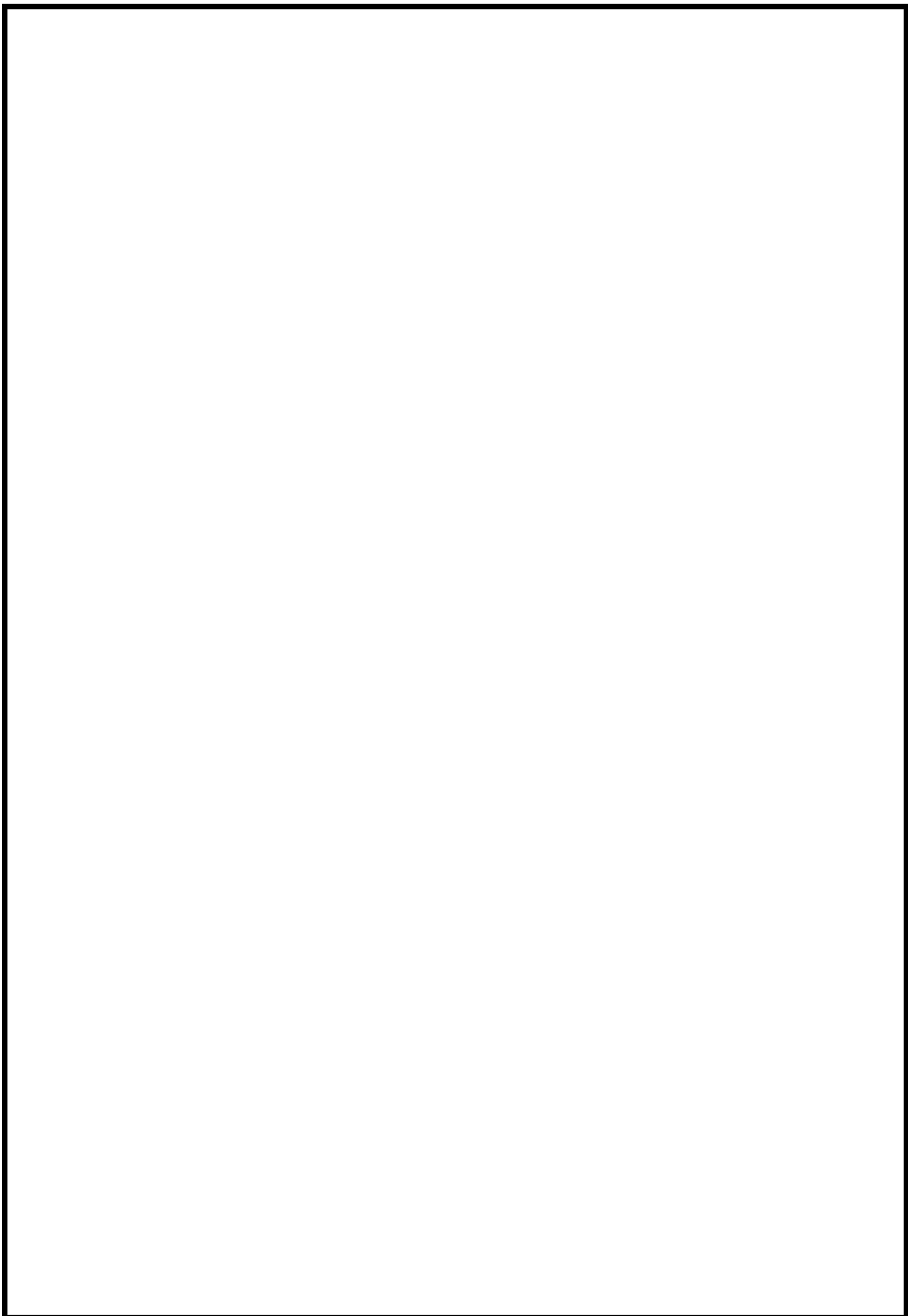
- Summarise the passage in *not more than 100 words*;
- *One coherent paragraph* is required;
- You must use *your own words*;
- Give your summary a *title*, which must be included in your word count.
- State accurately the *number of words* you have used.

There seems to be some confusion. On one hand, everyone wants to be a kid these days, hence those breakfast cereals that promise to 'bring out the kid in you' and the movie genre about 40-year-old bodies inhabited by fun-loving 10-year-old minds. But, at the same time, childhood is being redefined in the U.S. news media as a public safety hazard and breeding ground for pint-sized 'predators' who would just as soon slit your throat as click on for another round of a computer game.

There is a debate going on about the punishment of juvenile criminals. On one hand it is felt that, unless these 'predators' are punished as if they were adults, society will be less and less safe. On the other hand it is argued that having bad kids in grown-up courts and prisons puts the juveniles in the clutches of child molesters or crime-teachers already in the prisons.

So when did we start yearning for childhood and simultaneously hating so many of the little people to whom it rightly belongs? Despite the media fuss over 'killer kids' it's the grown-ups that commit 87% of violent crimes, which include plenty of crimes against children. Even the worst kids are victims themselves – in fact it's usually the worst kids who have been most grievously victimised. Most child criminals are desperately poor, many are the products of multiple foster homes, What we seem to be forgetting – both those of us who want to be ten again and those who want to lock up ten-year-olds – is that childhood is not just a triumph o miniaturisation.

Kids really are different. They require major investments of resources and energy on the part of adults to



Practice 4: A point form summary

A businessman is about to embark on a public relations tour of many countries. He asks his secretary to summarise in point form the ground rules for giving gifts in various places, so as not to offend the recipients, but to build better international relations. Help her to do this summarizing the information in GIVING AWAY under the sub-headings below. Use full sentences and do not exceed 91 words.

GIVING AWAY

Businessman, beware: if you give a Latin American woman a box of fancy handkerchiefs she may think you want to see her cry.

Present a Japanese something that has a 16-petal chrysanthemum decoration and he may consider you presumptuous. The chrysanthemum is the emperor's personal symbol and is not used commercially. An Argentinean would think you worse than presumptuous; a chrysanthemum, the favourite funeral flower in Argentina, suggests death.

Never give anything to an Arab's wife.

With the French and English, don't even think of giving gifts unless you know the person well. The French may think you're patronising them. The English find gift-giving somewhat vulgar and prefer to entertain in order to express their appreciation.

Different peoples in the world have extremely different attitudes on gift-giving. Americans are perhaps most fond of giving but the Arabs give the most lavish gifts and they may expect lavish gifts in return. The Japanese have a mania for giving gifts. Chinese custom prevents a host from receiving most gifts unless the recipient can be offered a good reason for accepting it.

Both the Chinese and Japanese consider that personal gifts should be given in private, so don't give a gift to a Japanese or Chinese in public unless you are giving a gift to everyone present on the occasion.

One other taboo: never give a knife to a Latin American – it implies you want to cut off your relationship with the recipient.

1. Latin American/Argentinian Taboos

1.1.....

1.2.....

1.3.....

2. Arabian customs

2.1.....

2.2.....

3. Chinese and Japanese Attitudes and Beliefs

3.1.....

3.2.....

3.3.....

3.4.....

4. Attitudes of Western Nations

4.1.....

4.2.....

4.3.....

4.4.....

REMEMBER TO ADHERE TO THE WORD COUNT LIMIT AND TO INCLUDE A WORD COUNT!