



Good Summaries—The Five Criteria

1. **A good summary condenses (shortens) the original text.** While it should be long enough to include the most important information, a rule of thumb for a summary is that it should be one-fourth to one-third as long as the original text if that text is 1–3 pages. It will vary greatly, for example, if it is a summary of a novel, book, or other long piece. The length also depends upon the purpose of the summary.
2. **A good summary includes only the most important information.** Ask the question: “Is this piece of information important for the reader to know about the original passage?” The summary writer will want to include enough information to serve the purpose of the summary.
3. **A good summary includes only what is in the passage.** A summary comes directly from the original text and does not include either other information the summary writer may know about the topic (background knowledge) nor any opinions the writer may have about the topic.
4. **A good summary is written in the summary writer’s own words.** The original text is not copied, but the ideas are translated (or paraphrased) into the writer’s own way of saying them. If a phrase or sentence can only be copied, it should be quoted. Using original words helps to condense the text.
5. **A good summary is well-written.** The writer follows the rules of writing (e.g., complete sentences, punctuation, capitalization, word usage, and organization). A summary is not a list like an outline.

The Conventions to Follow

- **Avoid using questions.** Questions are usually too indirect and less efficient in presenting information for a summary. They tend to make the summary longer rather than shorter.
- **Avoid first person.** Do not use “I” in a summary; the summary writer is not the author, and using “I” also leads to the use of background knowledge or opinion. When writing a summary of a narrative (story), use third person.
- **Avoid dialogue.** There may be times when dialogue is the best way to convey the original meaning of a text, but in general dialogue should not be used.
- **Begin the passage with information from the text.** Do not begin a summary with “This passage was about...” or “What I read was... .”



Summary

Life was very different in the United States 100 years ago. Only eight percent of people had a telephone, and a three-minute call from Denver to New York cost eleven dollars. That was about two weeks' pay for most workers. People made about 22 cents an hour. Figure out how much your daily time on the phone would have cost! Imagine living in a time when only about 14 percent of the homes in our country had a bathtub, and most women washed their hair only once a month. Yuck!

School? Ninety percent of all doctors had no college education, and only six percent of all Americans graduated high school. Two out of ten people couldn't even read or write. The highest-paying jobs were veterinarian and mechanical engineer. Do you think you would have liked to have lived in 1905?

1. Highlight or underline the most important information in the piece above.
2. What are two or three big ideas that you would include in a summary of this piece?

3. Write a two- or three-sentence summary of this short piece. Remember to follow the rules for good summary writing.

Summary Checklist

Read your summary or your partner's and check the traits below that apply.

____ The summary is one-fourth to one-third as long as the original.

____ It is accurate; all information comes from the original.

____ It is in the writer's own words.

____ I know the important information from the original.

____ Only important information is included.

____ Spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and sentences are correct.

My suggestions for changes, if any, are: _____

Summary Rubric

	Advanced	Proficient	Partially Proficient	Unsatisfactory
Important Information	Clear, complete representation of essential information from passage.	Some of essential information included; may be missing one important detail.	Partial but incomplete information. Some important points missing.	Information does not connect to the original passage.
Unimportant Information	Includes no unimportant information or details. Focuses only on the main points.	Includes little unimportant information or details.	Unimportant details included but do not interfere with important information.	Includes information not in the original passage or that is disconnected from original.
Use of Own Words	Effectively paraphrased or in writer's own words throughout.	Occasionally uses phrasing from text but mostly in writer's own words.	Several instances of direct copying from original passage. Some paraphrasing.	No attempt to write in own words. Copied from original text.
Writing Conventions	Well-structured with no errors in sentences or mechanics.	Clear structure with minimal errors in sentences and mechanics.	Errors evident but only minimally distracting to the reader.	Serious convention errors that render it incoherent.



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1. Highlight or underline the most important information in the piece above.

2. What are two or three big ideas that you would include in a summary of this piece?

Three big ideas that could be in the summary are people made about 22 cents an hour, 14% of homes didn't have a bathtub, and 2 of 10 people couldn't read or write.

3. Write a two- or three-sentence summary of this short piece. Remember to follow the rules for good summary writing.

There are many ways the United States was different 100 years ago. To begin, people who worked made only about 22 cents an hour. Second, only 14% of homes had a bathtub. Finally, 2 out of 10 people didn't know how to read or write. That is how life was different in the United States 100 years ago.
