Summarize Sources

Professional Communications OER: Writing

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# Introduction

Whether we are writing a report, recapping a story, telling our friends or family about the latest episode of our favourite TV show, or paraphrasing someone’s words, we all summarize information. In the workplace, an employee might write a summary or recommendation report, or a business letter. So much information is available at our fingertips; therefore, summarizing information has become a critical skill. As you summarize information, using your sources ethically—without infringing copyright or plagiarizing information—is critical.

In this activity you will summarize information from a variety of text-based sources. You will respond to and summarize information without having to write an essay. Your objective will be to summarize the ideas of others ethically without infringing copyright or plagiarizing. This activity builds upon the [plain language chapter](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TczeyBBBtCjKzyLwKhiWTvwvj-DMsEvCsY8r4jGeaoo/edit#heading=h.5jd3ba57ep3s) in the Foundations Module, as well as the [grammar and punctuation chapter](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fdpsj-6XRy-RNYDnzjGZmFRSxRRc5bz2x22kHxUYMEU/edit#heading=h.yadq0t9oy4ls) in the Writing Module.

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# Instructions for Summarizing Content (Take-Home Assignment Before Class)

* Find one to three articles online to read and summarize using the table below.
* Consider both the message and the primary audience. Identify the primary audience and purpose of the message in the table provided.
* List the key points from the paragraphs in the table provided.
* Summarize the ideas in the readings using direct quotations when necessary.
  + Be sure to consider the principles of plain language (see *Professional Communication: Foundations*)
  + The verbs you use in your summary suggest the author’s purpose. Be careful your verbs do not confuse the message or pass judgement on it.
  + Examples of verbs and what they may imply:
    - Tells (suggests the author’s purpose is to explain or narrate)
    - Claims (suggests the author is trying to persuade, but also implies you do not buy into it)
    - Exposes (suggests author’s purpose is to investigate something hidden)
    - Relates (suggests author’s purpose is to explain through comparison)
    - Compares (suggests author’s purpose is to draw similarities or highlight differences between topics)
    - Warns (suggests author’s purpose is to persuade through caution)
    - Implies (suggests persuasive writing; further suggests you’re skeptical about the author’s motivations and/or implications)
  + Your summary is **not** meant to entice the reader into thinking something interesting is coming—such as would be the case with a movie trailer. Rather, the purpose of a summary is to clearly and succinctly explain what the interesting ideas in a work are.
  + Your summary should be much shorter than the original work. If you read a three-paragraph letter, you should be able to summarize the main ideas in one or two sentences.
  + Make sure you include the sources you are summarizing information from. Also, when incorporating direct quotations, use proper citations.
* Bring your rewritten paragraphs to the (next class) for discussion

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# Instructions for Follow-Up In-Class Activity on Summarizing Content

* Exchange your summary with one of your classmates.
* Read his or her summary carefully, and provide feedback.
* Exchange feedback with your classmate when you have both had a chance to review and comment on each other’s summaries.
* Discuss your feedback comments.

Summarizing in Plain Language Worksheet

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| --- | --- |
| **Student Name:** | |
| Source 1 Title and URL | Main Idea and Supporting Detail |
|  |  |
| Summary of Information | |
|  | |
| Source 2 Title and URL | Main Idea and Supporting Detail |
|  |  |
| Summary of Information | |
|  | |
| Source 3 Title and URL | Main Idea and Supporting Detail |
|  |  |
| Summary of Information | |
|  | |