

Summarizing

Definition

Buckley (2004), in her popular writing text *Fit to Print*, defines the role of summarizing as reducing text to one-third or one-quarter its original size, clearly articulating the author's meaning, and retaining main ideas.

Purpose

Whereas quoting is best used when the author has expressed the idea in a unique way and restating it in your own words would detract from the idea, and paraphrasing is used to rephrase an author's ideas, including most of the details, the purpose of summarizing is to briefly present only the key points of an idea. Summarizing has many uses, as mentioned below.

Process

Following the same steps of paraphrasing, read the passage first to understand the author's intent.

In your own words, write the main points in sentence form.

Edit by deleting extraneous descriptors, details, and examples.

Reread the original passage to ensure that you have faithfully represented it in your summary.

Opposite to solid essay writing, the idea is to be brief and general rather than supporting all statements with facts, examples, or other details.

When summarizing is useful

Summarizing is useful in many types of writing, at different points in the writing process, and at different spots in a written essay or other piece of academic writing. The benefit of providing a snapshot of main points lies in offering the reader a "big picture" that allows the reader to contextualize what you are saying. For example, you can summarize:

- results of studies you are reporting on
- methods or approaches others have taken in an area you are describing
- various researchers'/authors' viewpoints on a given issues
- points you have made in an essay at any juncture or in a conclusion
- contents of a book you are reviewing
- issues peripheral to your paper but necessary for providing the context of your writing
- historical events leading to the event/issue/philosophy you are discussing

In addition to the advantages of summarizing for the reader, as a writer you gain a better sense of where you are going with your writing, which parts need elaboration, and whether or not you have comprehended the information you have collected.

Adapted from:

Buckley, J. (2004). *Fit to Print: The Canadian Student's Guide to Essay Writing*. (6th ed.) Toronto: Nelson.