

## Writing Summaries

A summary is a short restatement of something written by someone else. A summary represents the main ideas and opinions, but not the exact words, of the original author. Usually you write a summary in combination with other things. For example, you may be asked to summarize and evaluate or summarize and respond. Evaluating and responding allow you to state your own opinions, but summarizing does not.

### Understanding the text

When you summarize, or paraphrase, you use your own words. However, paraphrasing is more than simple word substitution. The first step is to take the time to mentally process (understand) each main idea; then, *without looking at the text*, explain it in your own words.

For a longer article, create “chunks” of text and process and paraphrase them separately. You can do this in the text margin or on a T-chart if you prefer. After each, compare your summary with the original to see if it has the same meaning and doesn’t leave anything important out. Revise each section if necessary to make it accurately reflect the author’s idea for that section.

The text chunk: “China’s Unsafe Food Practices” by Hu Ying, Asia Times Online, 28 Aug. 2007	My words
<p><i>Paragraph 1: Recent food-safety crises have highlighted the challenges that China faces in trying to regulate the diffuse food industry. Provincial and local officials throughout China are facing increasing pressure from Beijing to address the situation, particularly since both President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao publicly pledged to improve food safety and product quality.</i></p>	<p><i>China has a widespread problem with food safety, so local officials have asked the country’s leaders to improve the safety and quality of food products in China.</i></p>
<p><i>Paragraph 2: Despite speeches, updated laws and ad hoc committee meetings in Beijing, little is being done to change practices and increase safety and quality at the lower levels. If a lasting improvement is going to be achieved, provincial-level officials will have to increase their capacity and willingness to address unsafe production practices.</i></p>	<p><i>Even though the leaders have updated food safety laws, so far no one is policing the new laws. They need to develop better enforcement procedures.</i></p>

After you have paraphrased and checked each chunk, look at all your paraphrasing together: does it make up one cohesive main idea? Do the parts connect one to the other and make sense? Can you identify the author’s thesis? Have you omitted your personal opinions and judgments?

## Writing the summary

Do this.	It might look like this.
Identify <i>author</i> and <i>title</i> in a <i>signal phrase</i> .	<i>In the article “China’s Unsafe Food Practices,” reporter Hu Ying says that...</i>
Use <i>present tense verbs</i> .	<i>Ying explains that...He claims...</i>
Use <i>transitions</i> .	<i>However, he says those practices will be hard to fix...</i>
<i>Omit</i> examples.	(Note: Not <i>all</i> examples use “for example.” Examples include exact numbers, statistics, case studies, and personal stories)
Change direct quotes to <i>indirect</i> .	<i>...says that...</i>
If a piece is written in first person ( <i>I</i> ), <i>change to third person (she/he)</i> .	Frederick Douglass says that <i>he</i> confronted <i>his</i> abusive supervisor.
“Translate” figurative language.	“raise the bar”= <i>improve or raise standards</i>

*Contributed by Rosemary McKeever*



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