**Post-graduate Exam in English**

**A guide to writing a summary with in-text citations**

The purpose of a summary is to give the reader a clear, objective picture of the original text. The summary restates only the main points of a text without giving examples or details.

**Three principal requirements**

* a balanced coverage of the original
* presentation of the source material in a neutral way
* condensation of the source material in the summary writer’s own words

**Preliminary steps**

1. Skim the text, noting the paragraphs (or sections).
2. Read the text, highlighting important information.

(highlight the topic sentence, key points/key words/phrases, the concluding sentence; outline each paragraph in the margin).

1. In your own words, write down the main points of each section.
2. Write down the key support points for the main topic, but do not include minor detail.
3. Go through the process again, making changes as appropriate.

**Formal summary**

* Always use your own words, except for technical terms.
* Include enough support so that the presentation is clear.
* Do not paraphrase specialized vocabulary or technical terms.
* Include nothing more than what is contained in the original. (Do not include your own comments or evaluation.)
* Make sure the summary reads smoothly. Use enough linking words and supportive detail.

**The first sentence in a summary**

Most summaries begin with a sentence containing two elements: the source and the main idea.

*Examples*

In Anthony Tyson’s article ‘’Mapping Dark Matter with Gravitational Lenses,’’ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .

(main idea)

According to Anthony Tyson in his article ‘’Mapping Dark Matter with Gravitational Lenses,’’ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

(main idea)

**Reporting verbs**

*Examples*

Anthony Tyson’s 2005 paper **discusses** \_\_\_\_\_ .

Anthony Tyson in his article ‘’Mapping Dark Matter with Gravitational Lenses’’ **states**

**claims**

**argues**

**maintains** \_.

Use the most appropriate reporting words keeping in mind that some of them are less objective than others. Here are more reporting words:

**describe discuss suggest state present criticize explain maintain**

**report examine affirm recommend argue (against) reveal explain**

**presume assume insist assert contend illustrate allege claim posit**

**imply refute the claim observe**

**The first sentence**

Write an introductory paragraph that begins with a sentence, including an in-text citation of the source and the author as well as a reporting verb to introduce the main idea. The reporting verb is generally in the present tense.

*Example*: In his article "Michael Dell turns the PC world inside out," Andrew E. Serwer (1997) describes how Michael Dell founded Dell Computers and claims that Dell’s low-cost, direct-sales strategy and high quality standards account for Dell’s enormous success.

**Summary reminder phrases**

In a longer summary, you may want to remind your reader that you are summarizing.

The author goes on to say that …

The article further states that …

The author also states/argues/believes/concludes that …

In the second half of the paper, the author presents …

**Linking words**

Use linking words that reflect the organization and controlling idea of the original, for example cause-effect, comparison-contrast, classification, process, chronological order, persuasive argument, etc.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| addition | also in addition too as well |
| alternation | instead alternatively |
| cause | therefore so consequently thus |
| comparison | similarly in the same way likewise |
| concession | anyway at any rate |
| conclusion | in conclusion finally lastly |
| condition | then in that case |
| contradiction | in fact actually as a matter of fact |
| contrast | yet however but nevertheless |
| equivalence | in other words that means namely that is to say |
| example | for example for instance |
| generalisation | usually normally as a rule in general |
| highlight | in particular especially |
| inclusion | for example for instance such as as follows |
| counter-evidence | on the other hand conversely |
| stating the obvious | obviously naturally of course |
| summary | to sum up overall in brief in short |

**Check**

Does the summary provide a balanced coverage of the original and does it present the main idea of the original? Is there adequate support and explanation?

Is the summary objective (neutral)?

Have you used your own words?

Does the length of the summary meet the requirements of the assignment?

**References**

Swales John M. & Christine B. Feak. Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills, 3rd Edition, University of Michigan Press, 2011.

Brieger Nick. English for Business Writing. Harper Collins Publishers, 2011.