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Unit 1

Summary

Learning objectives

In this unit, you will learn:

- the purpose of a summary;
- the content of a summary;
- the structure of a summary;
- how to paraphrase ideas;
- how to use reporting verbs;
- how to write concisely.

Scenario

College students are often asked to write summaries of articles to show their understanding of the object of study and to practice writing skills. It is useful in many instances, for example, taking notes on readings, collecting and condensing information for a research paper, or bringing a broad range of information together and discovering the relevance of sources dealing with the same subject.

Suppose you are attending an international summer camp for student scholars where you collaborate with a group of foreign students on a garbage sorting project. While researching the literature in the field, you find an academic paper that you think will inspire the group's work and decide to write a summary to inform your partners of the main ideas of the paper. How are you going to do it? How can you help your partners understand the main ideas of the paper?



Part 1 Understanding the genre

1 Purpose of a summary

Task Read the sample summary below and discuss the questions that follow with a partner.

In the article “The Mindsets”, Dweck (2017) explains two mindsets that can affect people’s perception of themselves and, consequently, change their lives. The fixed mindset is rooted in the belief that physical differences such as the size of skull or genes determine people’s intelligence and character, and that these qualities are unchangeable. People with the fixed mindset, worrying that they are not good enough, tend to prove their intelligence, personality, or character in every situation. By contrast, the growth mindset is based on the belief that everyone has the potential for growth and change. People with this mindset believe that the initial talents and aptitudes are the basis for development and can be cultivated, for it is impossible to know a person’s true potential and to tell what a person can accomplish with consistent passion, effort, and training. The author emphasizes that with the growth mindset people can develop a passion for learning and seeking out new experiences to increase their abilities, and that the “passion for stretching oneself and sticking to it” can help people transcend the difficult times in life. (182 words)

1. What is the topic of the original article?
2. What are the main points of the original article?
3. What attitude does the cited author have on this topic?
4. What is the purpose of the summary, to inform the reader or to criticize the original article?

Writing tips

As a tool for academic training, the purpose of a summary is to demonstrate your understanding of the subject under study. But as an academic genre, its purpose is to **provide an overview of an article** to inform those who have not read the original article of its important points.

A good summary has four essential features:

- A good summary should be **short and brief**. A summary can be a single sentence,

a short paragraph, or a short article depending on the length and complexity of the source text and the purpose of the summary.

- A good summary should be **comprehensive**, including all the main points of the original text.
- A good summary should be **accurate**, presenting the author's viewpoints as they are.
- A good summary should be **objective**, expressing no personal opinions or critique of the author's ideas.

2 Content of a summary

2.1 Condensing the content

Task Read the original article in which Carol Dweck (2017) explains the difference between the fixed mindset and the growth mindset. Note down the information that you think is important and should be included in the summary. When you are finished, discuss with a partner whether the summary above is comprehensive, accurate, and objective. The chart below can help guide your discussion.

The Mindsets

Since the dawn of time, people have thought differently, acted differently, and fared differently from each other. It was guaranteed that someone would ask the questions of why people differed — why some people are smarter or more moral — and whether there was something that made them permanently different. Experts lined up on both sides. Some claimed that there was a strong physical basis for these differences, making them unavoidable and unalterable. Through the ages, these alleged physical differences have included bumps on the skull, the size and shape of the skull, and, today, genes. Others pointed to the strong differences in people's backgrounds, experiences, training, or ways of learning. A big champion of this view was Alfred Binet, the inventor of the IQ test. Without denying individual differences in children's intellects, he believed that education and practice could bring about fundamental changes in intelligence.

It's one thing to have pundits spouting their opinions about scientific issues. It's another thing to understand how these views apply to you. For thirty years, my research has shown that the view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life. How can a simple belief have the power to transform your psychology and, as a result, your life?

Believing that your qualities are carved in stone — the fixed mindset — creates an urgency to prove yourself over and over. If you have only a certain amount of intelligence, a certain personality, and a certain moral character — well, then you'd better prove that you have a healthy dose of them. It simply wouldn't do to look or feel deficient in these most basic characteristics.

There are so many people with this one consuming goal of proving themselves — in the classroom, in their careers, and in their relationships. Every situation calls for a confirmation of their intelligence, personality, or character. Every situation is evaluated: Will I succeed or fail? Will I look smart or dumb? Will I be accepted or rejected? Will I feel like a winner or a loser?

But doesn't our society value intelligence, personality, and character? Isn't it normal to want these traits? Yes, but ...

There's another mindset in which these traits are not simply a hand you're dealt and have to live with, always trying to convince yourself and others that you have a royal flush when you're secretly worried it's a pair of tens. In this mindset, the hand you're dealt is just the starting point for development. This growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts, your strategies, and help from others. Although people may differ in every which way — in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments — everyone can change and grow through application and experience.

Do people with this mindset believe that anyone can be anything, that anyone with proper motivation or education can become Einstein or Beethoven? No, but they believe that a person's true potential is unknown (and unknowable), and that it's impossible to foresee what can be accomplished with years of passion, toil, and training.

Did you know that Darwin and Tolstoy were considered ordinary children? That Ben Hogan, one of the greatest golfers of all time, was completely uncoordinated and graceless as a child? ... That Geraldine Page, one of our greatest actresses, was advised to give it up for lack of talent?

You can see how the belief that cherished qualities can be developed creates a passion for learning. Why waste time proving over and over how great you are, when you could be getting better? Why hide deficiencies instead of overcoming them? And why seek out the tried-and-true, instead of experiences that will stretch you? The passion for stretching yourself and sticking to it, even (or especially) when it's not going

well, is the hallmark of the growth mindset. This is the mindset that allows people to thrive during some of the most challenging times in their lives. (662 words)

[Source: Adapted from Dweck, C. S. (2017). *Mindset: Changing the way you think to fulfill your potential* (Rev. ed.). Robinson.]

Points to consider	Yes	No
1 The summary shows the correct understanding of the topic of the original article.		
2 The summary includes all the main points of the original article.		
3 The summary accurately represents the opinion of the original article.		
4 The summary presents the original article objectively.		

Writing tips

A summary is short. To keep to the word limit, you will have to condense the content so that it contains only the **important information** of the original article — **the main idea, the main points, and some important supporting details**.

You can follow the steps below to look for the important information to be included in your summary:

- **Find the main idea.** The main idea is the controlling idea of a piece of writing, an idea that the whole article tries to prove, illustrate, and develop. Skim through an article and highlight the topic sentences, key points or key words, and concluding sentences. This can help you quickly find the main idea.
- **Identify the main points.** Read the article carefully and try to find the major divisions. Usually, the subheadings in an article will tell you the keywords of a section. If there are no subheadings, try to divide the article into sections. Signpost language at the beginning of paragraphs, like *first*, *second*, *in addition*, and *however*, can help you locate the main points quickly.
- **Select the important supporting details.** Basically, a summary does not include details. But important details providing explanations are necessary in some cases. So, weigh up the details, leave out the minor ones, and keep those that help explain the main points.

2.2 Preparing an outline of the summary

When you have noted down the important information, you can organize them into a three-tier outline for your summary. You can move from the general down to the specific, with the main idea at the top, the main points that explain the main idea in the middle, and the supporting details (i.e. reasons and evidence) at the bottom.

Task Examine the information you have noted down when reading the original article above and complete the outline below.

The Mindsets

Main idea: _____

Main point 1: _____

Supporting detail 1: _____

2: _____

3: _____

Main point 2: _____

Supporting detail 1: _____

2: _____

3: _____

Writing tips

An outline is necessary in writing because it helps to visualize the relationships between ideas: What is the main idea? What are the main points explaining the main idea? What are the supporting details that illustrate or explain the main points? It is even more necessary and helpful when you are working on a long text, for example, a research article or a chapter of a book, as it not only helps enhance your understanding, but also offers you a roadmap for summarizing the text.

You can structure an outline in two formats. **Alphanumeric format** uses both letters and numbers to organize the different levels of the outline. **Decimal format** only uses numbers, and each level is set off with decimals. Here is what they look like.

Alphanumeric format

- I. Main idea
 - A. Main point
 - 1. Sub-point
 - a. Supporting details
 - B. Main point
- II. _____
- III. _____

Decimal format

- 1. Main idea
 - 1.1 Main point
 - 1.1.1 Supporting details
 - 1.2 Main point
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

3 Structure of a summary

Task The following sentences or sentence constituents are taken from the sample summary above. Use the items in the box to describe their communicative purposes and think about how the author stages them to develop a well-structured summary.

- A. Support the main idea with main points
- B. Make a conclusion
- C. Identify the source
- D. Explain the main points with important details
- E. Introduce the main idea of the original article

- 1. _____ In the article “The Mindsets” ...
- 2. _____ Dweck (2017) explains two mindsets that can affect people’s perception of themselves and, consequently, change their lives.
- 3. _____ The fixed mindset is rooted in the belief that ...
- 4. _____ People with the fixed mindset, ..., tend to prove ...
- 5. _____ By contrast, the growth mindset is based on the belief that ...
- 6. _____ People with this mindset believe that the initial talents and aptitudes are the basis for development and can be cultivated, for it is impossible to know ...
- 7. _____ The author emphasizes that with the growth mindset people can develop a passion for ...

Writing tips

A well-structured summary has four major moves.

- **Lead in:** Identify the source of the original article at the very beginning.
- **Set the focus:** Use a topic sentence to summarize the main idea of the whole article.
- **Provide support:** Support the main idea with the main points of the original article. Include one or two explanations of the main points if necessary.
- **Wrap up:** Conclude the summary, depending on how the original article ends.

Part 2 Using the right language



1 Paraphrasing

Task To paraphrase is to restate the important points of the source text without changing their meaning. Compare the three paraphrases of an excerpt from the original article in Part 1. Decide which one is the best and give your reason.

Original text

And why seek out the tried-and-true, instead of experiences that will stretch you? The passion for stretching yourself and sticking to it, even (or especially) when it's not going well, is the hallmark of the growth mindset. This is the mindset that allows people to thrive during some of the most challenging times in their lives.

Paraphrase 1

Why try to do what you have tried and proved to be true, rather than something that will stretch your limits? The passion for stretching your limits and sticking to it, especially when things are not going well, is the typical characteristic of the growth mindset. This mindset makes you strong and successful during the hard times in your life.

Paraphrase 2

It does no good to do what you have tried and what you are sure about. Rather, you should be brave to move outside the comfort zone and try new things to stretch yourself. The passion for challenges, a symbol of the growth mindset, is important because it makes people successful when they face big challenges in their lives.

Paraphrase 3

Choose to do things that will challenge you rather than the tried-and-true. A drive for pushing yourself and staying to it despite difficulties is the symbol of the growth mindset, the mentality that permits people to flourish during some of the most trying moments in their lives.

Writing tips

A summary is a condensed version of the original text written in your own words. It is acceptable to quote a few key terms or important viewpoints directly, but mostly you will need to paraphrase. Otherwise, you will run the risk of plagiarism.

Paraphrasing involves two tasks. First, rewrite the text. Second, faithfully represent the author's ideas. This is not easy because it requires you to not only understand the text but also have a good command of the language to express the same idea in a different way. The following tips may give you some clues on how to do it:

- **Focus on meaning rather than words and sentences.** A paraphrase shows your understanding of a text, so you should focus on the meaning of the whole rather than the individual words or sentences. You can start with reading until you fully understand the text. Note down a few key terms and important points for each paragraph while reading, and then put the original text away and rewrite it from the notes using your own words. Do not try to rewrite the text sentence by sentence. It will lead to plagiarism.
- **Revise what remains similar to the original.** When you finish the first draft, there may be some sentences similar to the original. You can use synonyms to replace some of the words or clauses, e.g. use “self-perceptions” for “how people think about themselves.” You can also change the sentence structure, breaking long sentences into short ones or combining short sentences into longer ones. For example, “People with this mindset believe that the initial talents and aptitudes are the basis for development and can be cultivated, for it is impossible to know a person’s true potential and to tell what a person can accomplish with consistent passion, effort, and training.” This sentence combines sentences from different paragraphs of the original article.
- **Use reminder phrases.** In a long summary, you need to remind the reader from time to time that you are paraphrasing the author’s idea. You can repeat the author’s family name or simply use “the author(s)” where appropriate. For example,
Dweck (2017) further states that ...
Dweck (2017) also believes that ...
The author also states / maintains / argues that ...
The author concludes that ...

2 Using reporting verbs

In academic writing, you will often refer to research and introduce ideas by using reporting verbs, such as *argue*, *suggest*, and *show*. Using them correctly depends on accurate understanding of the purpose of the article and the author's attitudes toward the research or the topic. Reporting verbs indicate the strength of the author's opinion, with some being strong (e.g. *argue*), some tentative (e.g. *suggest*), while some others neutral (e.g. *show*). They also show the author's intentions, for example, to report research results, to raise a counterargument, or to criticize.

Task 1 Look again at the first sentence of the summary in Part 1 with reference to the original article. Underline the reporting verb and discuss the questions that follow with a partner.

In the article "The Mindsets", Dweck (2017) explains two mindsets that can affect people's perception of themselves and, consequently, change their lives.

1. Does the author of the summary use the correct reporting verb to indicate the purpose of the original article?
2. How does the reporting verb indicate the cited author's attitude — strong, tentative, or neutral?
3. What other reporting verbs can be used here?

Writing tips

Reporting verbs are often used to paraphrase what someone else has said, or to refer to what someone has done or believes. You need to choose the right one in terms of **strength** and **function** to restate the cited author's idea accurately.

Strength	Examples	Function
strong	argue (against), assert, claim, maintain, contend, insist, emphasize, highlight, support the view that, strongly believe that, deny, negate, refute, challenge, counter the view that, criticize	indicating the author makes a strong argument or counterargument
tentative	suggest, recommend, speculate, hypothesize, imply, propose, question the view that	indicating the author wants to soften his / her idea, trying not to be absolutely certain
neutral	state, note, observe, show, discuss, indicate, report, explain, describe, investigate, study, illustrate, demonstrate, point out, prove, conclude	indicating the author's aim is to describe the research in a factual way

Generally, reporting verbs are in the present tense when introducing the cited author's ideas. But the past tense is used when referring to the completed activity, or information once considered true but has now been corrected.

Task 2 In the following box are some commonly used reporting verbs. Read the sentences below and the definitions in brackets carefully. Then complete the sentences with the correct reporting verbs according to the strength and function described in the definitions. Change the form if necessary.

argue	demonstrate	suggest	hypothesize
explain	discuss	reveal	assert

1. In this article, the author _____ how children’s thinking processes develop. (to say something in a way that is easy to understand)
2. The research _____ that low fat and high carbohydrate diets are not as healthy as they are traditionally believed. (to make previously unknown information known)
3. The researchers _____ that cooking an egg may denature some of the proteins responsible for the allergic response. (to suggest a possible explanation for something although without knowing whether it is really true)
4. Taylor (1991) _____ that we are social beings, constructing meaning within dialogical interaction with others. (to give clear reasons why something is true)
5. Research into collaborative working _____ that groups seem to achieve some of the best, and some of the worst, outcomes. (to state or express something indirectly)
6. Research in social studies of literacy _____ that literacy practices are fully shaped by economic, political, and cultural contexts, as well as social interactions. (to show the truth of something that has been observed or investigated)
7. Peace (2003) _____ (to write about something in detail and consider different opinions) the pros and cons of “top-down” and “bottom-up” theories of language and _____ (to state firmly that something is true) that both approaches can be problematic.

3 Writing concisely

It is likely that the first draft of your summary will be overly wordy because of repetitions, long expressions, complex structures, or useless words. If this happens, you need to tighten the sentences.

Task The following sentences are correct in grammar and use of words, but not good in style because they are not concise. Read the sentences and tighten them for better style.

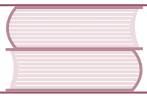
1. The article mainly explains two mindsets that can affect people’s perception of themselves and, consequently, change their lives.
2. Some argued that such physical differences as bumps on the skull, the size and shape of the skull, and genes make the difference.
3. People’s intelligence and character are influenced by their backgrounds, experiences, training, or ways of learning.

4. There are two mindsets that affect people's perception of themselves differently and, consequently, change their lives.
5. The reason that people's views of themselves can affect their lives is that these beliefs can change their psychology.
6. The passion for challenges even in difficult times is the trademark of the growth mindset, which is an essential mentality for people to go through the hard times in their lives.
7. The author makes a suggestion that one move outside the comfort zone and experience different things.

Writing tips

Stylistically, a summary should be **concise**. Therefore, you need to write in condensed language. You can tighten the sentences by:

- **Delete unnecessary qualifiers.** Some qualifiers are not necessary to express meaning, for example, *actually, basically, generally, mainly, probably, really, and very*.
- **Avoid redundancy.** Remove the redundant words that are already implied in the sentences.
- **Change the passive voice into active voice.** Although the meaning of a sentence in the passive voice is clear, it uses more words than necessary. Change the passive voice into the active voice to be more concise.
- **Remove expletives.** Function words like *there be* is a weak way to start a sentence. When this happens, cut them off and use precise verbs.
- **Reduce complex structures to simple structures.** Expressions like *the reason that ... is, the reason for, given the fact that, considering the fact that, in the event that* can be replaced by *because, since, or if*.
- **Delete extraneous phrases.** When attributive clauses contain *that is, which is / are, or who is / are*, simplify the clauses into phrases.
- **Avoid nominalization.** When a verb will suffice, do not use expressions like *make a suggestion, give an analysis, or give an explanation*. Use *suggest, analyze, explain* instead.



Part 3 Evaluating and revising

1 Evaluating a summary

Task Read the following source text and the summary. Then evaluate the summary using the checklist that follows. Compare with a partner when you are finished.

Source text

The focus on the skills needed in a digital age raises questions about the purpose of universities. Is their purpose to provide ready-skilled employees for the workforce? Is it really the job of historians or physicists to teach skills such as attentive listening, time management or social perceptiveness?

Certainly, the rapid expansion in higher education is largely driven by government, employers and parents wanting a workforce that is employable, competitive, and if possible affluent. Indeed, preparing professional workers has always been one role for universities, which have a long tradition of training for the law and much later, government administration. Secondly, focusing on the skills required for a knowledge-based society merely reinforces the kind of learning, especially the development of intellectual skills, in which universities have taken great pride in the past.

Indeed, in this kind of labor market, it is critical to serve the learning needs of the individual rather than specific companies or employment sectors. To survive in the current labor market, learners need to be flexible and adaptable, and should be able to work just as much for themselves as for corporations that increasingly have a very short operational life. The challenge then is not re-purposing education but making sure it meets that purpose more effectively. (209 words)

[Source: Adapted from Bates, A. W. (2019). *Teaching in a digital age: Guidelines for designing teaching and learning* (2nd ed.). Tony Bates Associates Ltd. <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/teachinginadigitalagev2/>]

Summary

The focus on skills needed in a digital age raises the question about whether the purpose of education is to provide skilled workers. The government, employers and parents all want students to be employable, competitive, and rich. But they neglect the fact that making students professionally prepared has long been the purpose of

university education. Actually, focusing on skills strengthens the kind of learning, such as intellectual skills universities have been emphasizing all the time. It is important to prepare students for the changing labor market. So the challenge is not to re-purpose education, but to find effective ways to prepare students for the changing labor market. (107 words)

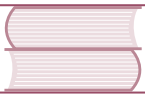
Checklist for a summary

Components	Questions to consider	Comments
Purpose	1 What is the purpose of the original article? 2 Does the summary accurately report that purpose?	
Content	3 Does the summary include all the important points and important supporting details? 4 Does the summary report faithfully the author's viewpoints?	
Structure	5 Is the summary well-organized and coherent?	
Language	6 Is the summary concise? 7 Is it written in one's own words?	

Further improvements:

2 Revising the summary

Task Based on your evaluation and suggestions for improvement, revise the summary above. When you are finished, switch your revised version with a partner and evaluate their revised version by referring to the checklist above.



Part 4 Writing your own summary

Task Now, find an academic paper on garbage sorting and write a summary of it. Use the following step-by-step explanation of writing a summary and the checklist in Part 3 as a guide. When you are finished, compare your work with a partner or show it to your teacher.

Step

1

Read the text and take notes

Skim through the text to look for subheadings or divide the text into different sections when there is no subheading. While reading, note down the source, the main idea, major points, and important supporting details.

Step

2

Organize your notes into an outline

Structure the outline to visualize the relationships between the main idea, major points, and important supporting details.

Step

3

Develop the outline into a coherent paragraph

- Begin your summary by identifying the source.
- Follow it with a summary of the main idea in one sentence.
- Support the main idea with the major points.
- Explain the major points with important supporting details, if necessary.
- Conclude the summary properly.

Step

4

Revise the summary

Revise the structure and the content of your summary to make sure the summary is structured in a general-to-specific pattern and includes all the important information.

Step

5

Edit the summary

Edit the summary to make sure the language is concise and accurate.

Step

6

Seek feedback

Seek feedback from a peer and / or your teacher to help you identify any potential weaknesses. Then, make necessary improvements.