

How to Summarise Longer Texts – TASKS

Academic Writing – Incorporating Evidence (paraphrasing – summarising)

Academic writing involves a lot of recycled material. In many cases at university, you are asked to summarise and rephrase information from other authors. This paraphrasing and summarising is an important skill for you to improve throughout your academic career.

The following stages may be useful in your summarising process:

1. **Read and understand the text carefully.**
2. **Think about the purpose of the text.**
 - a. What is the author's purpose in writing the text?
 - b. What is your purpose in writing your summary?
 - c. Are you summarising to support your points?
 - d. Or, are you summarising so you can criticise the work before you introduce your main points?
3. **Select the relevant information.** This depends on your purpose.
4. **Find the main ideas - what is important.**
 - a. They may be found in topic sentences.
 - b. Omit details and examples, unimportant information, anecdotes, examples, illustrations, data etc.
 - c. Find alternative words/synonyms for these words/phrases where possible - do not change specialised vocabulary and common words.
5. **Put the original text away**

6. **Rewrite the main ideas in complete sentences.** Combine your notes into a piece of continuous writing. Use conjunctions and adverbs such as 'therefore', 'however', 'although', 'since', to show the connections between the ideas.
7. **Check your work.**
 - a. Make sure your purpose is clear.
 - b. Make sure the meaning is the same.
 - c. Make sure the style is your own.
 - d. Remember to acknowledge other people's work.

Example

As part of an essay, you need to include a section of about 100 words on the formation of volcanic islands. You find the text below. Follow the steps below.

1. Read the passage carefully *twice* from beginning to end.
2. Remember your purpose: to describe the formation of a volcanic island.
3. Select the relevant information
4. Underline all the points which should come into your answer. Do this very carefully, and be sure not to miss anything.

Volcanic Islands

Islands have always fascinated the human mind. Perhaps it is the instinctive response of man, the land animal, welcoming a brief intrusion of earth in the vast, overwhelming expanse of sea. When sailing in a great ocean basin, a thousand miles from the nearest continent, with miles of water beneath the ship, one may come upon an island which has been formed by a volcanic eruption under the sea. One's imagination can follow its slopes down through darkening waters to its base on the sea floor. One wonders why and how it arose there in the midst of the ocean.

The birth of a volcanic island is an event marked by prolonged and violent travail: the forces of the earth striving to create, and all the forces of the sea opposing. At the place where the formation of such an island begins, the sea floor is probably nowhere more than about fifty miles thick. In it are deep cracks and fissures, the results of unequal cooling and shrinkage in past ages. Along such lines of weakness the molten lava from the earth's interior presses up and finally bursts forth into the sea. But a submarine volcano is different from a terrestrial eruption, where the lava, molten rocks, and gases are hurled

into the air from an open crater. Here on the bottom of the ocean the volcano has resisting it all the weight of the ocean water above it. Despite the immense pressure of, it may be, two or three miles of sea water, the new volcanic cone builds upwards towards the surface, in flow after flow of lava. Once within reach of the waves, its soft ash is violently attacked by the motion of the water which continually washes away its upper surface, so that for a long period the potential island may remain submerged. But eventually, in new eruptions, the cone is pushed up into the air, where the lava hardens and forms a rampart against the attacks of the waves.

5. Make notes

- island formation: earth versus sea.
- where? sea bed, not more 50 miles thick, cracked and uneven.
- weak → lava bursts through.
- c.f. land volcano: no sea pressure
- how? lava cone pushes upwards
- surface - washed away by waves → submerged
- lava hardens → island.

6. Read this student summary written from their notes, referring to the original only when you want to make sure of some point.

A volcanic island comes into being after a long and violent struggle has taken place between the forces of the earth and the sea. The island begins to form when hot lava breaks through weak points on the sea-bed where the earth's crust is not more than fifty miles thick and is marked by deep cracks. The volcanic island, unlike a land volcano, has to push up through the immense pressure of the sea. The cone made up of lava finally reaches the surface, but it does not appear because waves wash away its upper surface. When the lava hardens it stands up to the waves and the island is formed.

Compare this rewritten version by an ASK Tutor. It what ways has it been improved?

A volcanic island is born only after a long and violent struggle between the forces of the earth and the sea. It begins to form when hot lava breaks through a cracked and uneven part of the sea-bed where the earth's crust is weak. Unlike the land volcano, it has to build upwards despite the immense water-pressure until it finally reaches the surface. Even then it is too soft to withstand the waves and remains underwater until the cone is pushed into the air from below and the lava hardens.

7. Check your work.



Take care to make your text accurate. Your sentences should be well connected to each other so that your text reads as a continuous paragraph. Every rewrite will create a better text.

Task 2 – Using the steps above, write a summary using the following information:

As part of an essay, you need to include a section of about 100 words on the advantages and disadvantages of progress from the Samoans' point of view. You find the following text:

Progress in Samoa

Samoa Sasa sat cross-legged in his one-room, open-air home, shooing away chickens that strutted across the floor mats. Bananas cooked on the wood stove. Naked children cried in nearby huts. From one hut came the voice of Sinatra singing 'Strangers in the Night' on a local radio station.

The sound of progress frightened Sasa. For most of his 50 years, time has stood still. Now small European-styled homes are springing up around his village in Western Samoa and the young men are leaving for New Zealand. In the town there are experts from all over the world advising the Samoan Government on many development projects that Sasa does not understand.

The people of Luatuanuu Village - including his eight children - have always worked the banana plantations and respected the custom that the Matais (family chiefs) like Sasa represented absolute authority.

They owned all the land communally, they elected a parliament and they administered justice in each village, thus leaving few duties for the nation's 219-man police force. Would all that, too, change? Sasa wondered.

'We are a poor country and change must come,' Sasa said through a translator. 'But I do not want it so fast. I do not want my children to go to New Zealand to look for big money. I want them to stay here in Luatuanuu and work our plantations as we always have done.' The confusion Sasa feels is shared by many of the 150,000 Western Samoans - and undoubtedly by the peoples of other newly independent, developing nations as well. The capital, Apia, is teeming with people wanting to help: an 80-member US Peace Corps headquarters, experts from the United Nations, investors from Japan, and analysts from the Asian Development Bank and civil engineers from New Zealand.

Already streets are being torn up for a new road system. The hospital is being rebuilt with a loan from New Zealand. A new \$1 million Government hotel has opened to promote tourism - an industry the country is not quite sure it wants. A loan from the Asian

Development Bank will modernise the communications system. Japanese investors have opened a sawmill and are building houses. When these and many other development schemes are completed and Western Samoa, one of the world's poorest nations in cash terms, is forced into the twentieth century, what is to become of its culture?

'Most Samoans want the modern amenities, but they don't want to throw away our culture to get them,' said Felise Va'a, editor of the Samoan Times. 'There is no easy answer because in many ways our culture retards development. The question people are asking is, what is a balance between the past and the future?'

The tradition of communal land ownership stultifies individual incentive and has resulted in neglect of the land. The system of permitting only the nation's 15,000 Matais to elect 45 of the 47 MPs destroys political involvement. The exodus to New Zealand - and the money the emigrants send home - creates a false economy and results in thousands of Samoan families ignoring the land and living off the earnings of their expatriate children.

New Zealand permits 1,500 Western Samoan immigrants a year and each year 1,500 - one per cent of the population - go. They, together with thousands of other Samoans in New Zealand on temporary work visas, send home about \$3 million a year. The money provides a boost to Western Samoa's agricultural economy, but it also is inflationary, and the inflation rate has been 35 per cent in two years.

Western Samoa has travelled a long way in the 12 years since independence. It has political stability and a people who are 90 per cent literate. It offers investors a cheap labour force, and a land that is 80 per cent uncultivated. It offers visitors the most uncorrupted Polynesian culture left anywhere today.

Paraphrasing

How is paraphrasing different from summarising?

Paraphrasing is useful when you are using the work of others to support your own view. When paraphrasing, you need to change the words and the structure but keep the meaning the same. Remember that even when you paraphrase someone's work, you must still acknowledge it by referencing the source.

Task 1 – Following the same guidelines as before, paraphrase the following short extracts.

Example:

Paul Ekman from the University of California has conducted a long series of experiments on how non-verbal behaviour may reveal real inner states.



Paul Ekman who works at the University of California has performed a sequence of investigations on the way non-verbal behaviour may disclose real internal conditions.

- a. There are reckoned to be over 4,000 plant species used by forest dwellers as food and medicine alone.

- b. Memory is the capacity for storing and retrieving information.

- c. Research and publications are accumulating in each of the four fields of anthropology at an exponential rate.

- d. It is worth looking at one or two aspects of the way a mother behaves towards her baby.

This is not enough by itself. You also need to change the words and the structure of the text.

Task 2 - Identify the meaning relationships in the text and express them in a different way.

Example:

Many invertebrates, on the other hand, such as snails and worms and crustacea, have a spiral pattern of cleavage.

In contrast, many invertebrates, such as snails and worms and crustacea, have a spiral pattern of cleavage.



- a. Similarly, the muscles will not grow in length unless they are attached to tendons and bones so that as the bones lengthen, they are stretched.

- b. Besides being a theory about the basis and origin of knowledge and the contents of our minds in general, empiricism is also sometimes a methodology.

- c. As opposed to this, Locke is often supposed to be saying that, in addition to properties, things have a "substratum" which "supports" their properties.

- d. Consequently, in a sense, one may speak of the Common Law as unwritten law in contrast with Statute Law, which is written law.