

Learn English Summary Writing

Practice English Writing

Writing a summary is hard because it requires two thinking skills.

The first is finding the main idea. The second is organizing information so that the main idea is explained with reasons and details while ignoring the unimportant parts.

This intermediate+ level lesson show ESL students how to write a summary using a four-step process called FACT.

Part 1. What is a Summary?

A summary has several important features:

- it's short
- talks about the main idea
- provides important information (e.g. examples) that make the main idea easy to understand
- excludes unnecessary information
- uses your own words, though some key words from the original story are okay

One final point.

A summary is not just a bunch of sentences put together in a paragraph. It should be well written with a beginning, middle and end. A well written summary is a story about a story.

Why learn to summarize?

Summary writing helps students develop skills that can be used in school and at work:

- Evaluate: separate the important from unimportant
- Organize: create text with a logical order (it's like a puzzle)
- Vocabulary: expand word knowledge
- Clarity: write clear text focused on one idea

Part 2. FACT

Use these four steps to write a summary.

Step 1 Focus

Describe the main idea in a sentence or two. Be specific.

How can you find the main idea? Ask questions, like these:

- What is the story's purpose?
- What is the message?
- What is the thesis?
- What are the reasons?

You may want to use sentence patterns like these:

- It's a story about
- The story investigates what happens when

Step 2. Analyze

Take the main idea and divide it into small parts. For each part, write two or three sentences. Imagine these parts are like the ingredients in a recipe.

When writing a summary of a story (text or video), ask yourself these questions:

- What happens?
- Who are the characters?
- What is the setting?
- Is there conflict or tension?
- What is the cause and the effect?

The summary should include enough information to answer basic questions, like who what, where, when, why and how.

However, the summary should not include all of the details. Seeing what's important, and what's not, is a skill that can be learned over time with practice.

Step 3. Conclude

It's one or two sentences that describe the ending.

Step 4. Tighten

Tight writing means you edit your text to remove unnecessary words or details. The summary should focus on describing the main idea.

Part 3. Summary Writing Activity 1

Read the story in the attached [summary writing worksheet](#). Write a 1 to 2 paragraph summary.

Part 4. Summary Writing Activity 2

This ESL writing activity asks students to watch a short video and write a summary of the story. In addition, they will write a personal response to the story's message.

1. Watch the video.
2. Write a sentence or two to describe the main idea.
3. Analyze the video by writing short phrases that describe the main parts of the story as they relate to the main idea.
4. Organize these short phrases into some logical order.
5. Write a summary. It should be a story with a beginning, middle and end.
6. Tighten the paragraph. Edit your writing to remove mistakes. Be sure your paragraphs provides a few examples and details that explain the main idea.

Here are two video options. Your summary should include some discussion about the characters, plot and setting. Does this story have a message? What's the point?

Video 1: Momentos

Here is the video. It was directed by [Nuno Rocha](#).

Video 2: Howl

This video is called Howl. It was made by students who graduated from Bezalel academy of Art and Design in Israel.

[Howl](#) from [Natalie Bettelheim](#) on [Vimeo](#).