

# **What are the Characteristics of an Effective Summary?**

## **An effective summary captures the most important information**

The important information usually includes controlling ideas (purpose statements and topic sentences), major findings, and conclusions or recommendations.

It usually doesn't include any of the following: non-essential background information; the author's personal comments or conjectures; introductions; long explanations, examples, or definitions; visuals; or data of questionable accuracy.

## **An effective summary is highly readable**

People read summaries to get the information they need as efficiently as possible. In a large document, the summary may be the only part a reader actually reads. Make sure to write in a readable, clear style. Translate specific details into general statements (e.g., instead of "47.3% of respondents polled said they agreed or strongly agreed that food labels should include information about the percentage of trans fats the food item contained," summarize to "Almost half of respondents want food labels to include trans fats").

## **An effective summary can stand on its own**

Think of your summary as a highly condensed version of the source document. All the extras have been squeezed out, but the essential meaning should still be there. A reader should be able to read, understand and find the essential meaning by reading your summary. Readers should have to turn to the source document only if they need more detail—not to get the main ideas.

## **An effective summary is faithful to the original**

As a rule, add nothing to the original. Avoid adding comments or modifiers that add meaning that was not in the original (e.g. "The authors correctly point out," "The report seems to suggest," "This important recommendation").

## **An effective summary is as concise as possible**

Use the fewest words possible that still preserve all the essential meaning. Whatever you do, don't sacrifice clarity for economy.

From <<http://web.uvic.ca/~sdoyle/E302/Notes/SummaryNotes.html>>