



Summarising

The words 'paraphrasing' and 'summarising' are sometimes used interchangeably, but usually they are used to mean two different techniques. If you're not sure if you're required to summarise or paraphrase, check with your tutor.

A **summary** is a description of the main ideas of a text, so it is shorter than the original text. A journal article might be summarised in a single paragraph, for example, or a whole book summarised in a few paragraphs. To summarise something – like a TV show or an article – is to condense it down to the 'bare bones'.

A **paraphrase**, in contrast, is rewriting a piece of text in your own words, while retaining the meaning. It is usually similar in length to the original text.

Both paraphrasing and summarising are important techniques in academic writing.

You'll use paraphrasing and summarising both when you take notes during your research and when you incorporate evidence from sources into your own work.

In this PDF we cover:

- summary vs paraphrase
- writing a summary
- using a summary

Summary vs paraphrase

Summary	Paraphrase
Can be very short	Should be about the same length as the original text
Communicates only the main ideas, leaving out supporting ideas and examples	More detailed than summary and can include supporting ideas and examples
Uses different words to the original text	Uses different words to the original text

The technique of summarising is when you describe the main idea of a text in concise terms.

It's a bit like describing a movie or TV show to a friend – you concentrate on only the most important information. You can write summaries of sources to use in your writing to support your claims in broad terms.

Writing a summary

Sample text from source:

The challenge for you as a student nurse is to move beyond mastering the skills of data collection to develop your confidence in analysing and interpreting findings, identifying and clustering abnormal data and determining nursing priorities. Although beginning nurses lack the depth of knowledge and expertise that experienced nurses have, they can still learn to improve their clinical judgement skills. Etheridge (2007) found that new nurse graduates learned to "think like a nurse" and develop confidence in making clinical judgements through multiple clinical experiences with a wide variety of patients, support from educators and experienced nurses, and sharing experiences with their peers. Making the most of clinical placements by seeking opportunities to develop these skills is essential in the transition from student nurse to beginning practitioner.

From Lewis and Foley (2014, p. 61).

How would you summarise this paragraph? Start with what's the main idea or message, or ask yourself, what is the writer trying to do? Is the writer describing something, explaining a process, or a persuading someone?

Some examples:

Lewis and Foley (2014) explain the importance of clinical placement in the development of clinical judgement skills.

OR

Student nurses face many challenges, especially when it comes to making clinical judgements, but they can overcome these with appropriate support (Lewis & Foley, 2014).

OR

New nurses often have difficulty making clinical judgements, but they can improve their skills in this area through experience and support, particularly during clinical placement (Lewis & Foley, 2014).

OR

.... Fill in your own

Using a summary

Imagine that you're writing an essay. The topic is:

'Describe some of the challenges faced by student nurses, and ways that these challenges can be overcome.'

You have decided to discuss the essay topic in two parts: clinical challenges and personal challenges.

Here are some examples of integrating a summary of Lewis and Foley (2014) into a paragraph on clinical challenges.

Student nurses face multiple challenges in the clinical environment. One of these is difficulty making clinical judgements, but with appropriate support students nurses can overcome this obstacle (Lewis & Foley, 2014, p. 61).

OR

Student nurses face multiple challenges in the clinical environment. According to Lewis and Foley (2014, p. 61), one of these is difficulty making clinical judgements, but with appropriate support students nurses can overcome this obstacle.

Note the citation difference here – in the first example the citation is fully in parentheses at the end of the sentence, whereas in the second example the author names are used in the sentence itself, with the phrase ‘according to...’, and the year of publication in parentheses as per APA style. Both are correct uses of in-text citations in APA style.

However, you might want to use a more specific idea or example from this text, in which case you should consider writing a paraphrase instead of a summary.

Note: Under APA guidelines you are not required to give a page number unless you are directly quoting from the source, however if you paraphrase or summarise a specific section of the text you should consider including the page number.

See the University Library’s [Referencing and Citation guides](#) for assistance with different styles.

More information

- UNSW: Selecting information for assignments
- UniLearning: Notetaking: Direct and indirect quotes
- University of Adelaide: To paraphrase or to quote? (PDF, 354 kB)
- Royal Literary Fund: Direct quotation, paraphrasing and referencing
- The Writing Center at UNC-Chapel Hill: Quotations
- Deakin University: Summarising, paraphrasing and quoting

References

Lewis, P., & Foley, D. (2014). *Health assessment in nursing*. Philadelphia, PA: Wolters Kluwer / Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.