

Writing Summaries

What is a Summary?

A summary is a shortened or condensed version of a reading. In a summary, you include only the most important concepts or ideas, and you leave out the less important ideas, examples, and details. However, in most cases, a summary is written as one or more paragraphs that make the main points clear to someone who has not read the chapter, brochure, book, or article that you are summarizing.

What do instructors want to see in a summary?

- **Accuracy:** Did you report the author's ideas accurately?
- **Completeness:** Did you include all the key points or ideas?
- **Emphasis:** Did you give the same level of importance that the author did to the ideas?
- **Readability:** Did you write it in an easy-to-understand paragraph form?
- **Your Own Words:** Did you mostly use your own words, using quotation marks to mark the places where you used the author's exact wording?

Reading for a Summary

To write a good summary, you need to understand the reading. Take time to read the original text carefully so that you can pull out the main ideas. If you are having trouble with the reading, the best way to get a better understanding is to talk to other students, to the teacher, or to a tutor about the ideas in the reading. Especially try to identify the following:

The thesis or primary message of the reading

This often can be found near the beginning and/or near the end of the reading. It is a good idea to circle it. If you cannot find an exact statement of the author's central message, you should write in your own words the primary message that you think the author is making in the reading.

The sections into which the reading can be divided

Identify the sections or divisions that the author used to organize the reading. This is like making an outline of the reading. If you're lucky, the reading will already have headings and subheadings to show these sections. If there are no headings, you should try to create your own headings in the margins of the reading to show yourself the different sections into which the reading can be organized.

The support used to back up the author's key points

Take note of what the author uses to back up her/his points. Does the author use examples, statistics, arguments, reasons, and expert opinion? It is useful to use a pen, pencil, and/or highlighter to mark up the original text. Making a visual map of the article or text's development helps you prepare to write your summary. For example, circle or draw a box around the main point of a paragraph, draw lines connecting it to the most important supporting points in the paragraph, or write numbers next to the supporting points.

Additionally, try making a visual map of the article or text's development directly on the original.

For example, circle the main point of a paragraph, and draw lines or arrows to the supporting points to show their connections to the main point of that paragraph.

Creating an Outline

The job of summarizing becomes much easier if you create an outline of the reading. An outline will not only give you a writing plan to follow as you write your summary, it will also help you avoid copying too much of the wording from the reading. Because the summary needs to be in your own words, you should cover up the reading or put it away, and then write the summary only looking at the outline. Use the headings and your notes and markings on the reading to help you create the outline. To see an example outline to use as your model, see page 6 of this resource.

- At the top of the outline, write the thesis or main message the author is making.
- Next, make an outline of the main ideas and any supporting ideas you want to include in the summary.

Avoid Plagiarism

You need to use your own wording in any summary that you write. The best way to help you avoid copying the author's wording is to develop a system that you use consistently to remind yourself when you are using your own wording (paraphrasing) and when you are copying the author's wording. Whether you are creating the outline of the reading, taking any notes on the reading, or writing the summary, make sure that you clearly indicate when you are copying the author's exact words and when you are using your own words. The traditional way to identify the author's wording is to use quotation marks " " around the author's wording. You could also try other strategies like highlighting or underlining the author's words. Whichever coding system you use, it is important that you can easily tell the difference between your own wording and the author's wording.

Tips for What to Leave Out

- Repetition of similar ideas. Authors often restate the same ideas using different words.
- Most detailed support, such as examples, anecdotes, descriptions, statistics, and dialogue
- Direct quotes (unless there is no other way to give the information)
- Digressions (ideas that do not seem directly related to the author's main points)
- Jokes and figures of speech
- Your own opinions or comments about the article or author

Tips for Writing a Summary

- In the first sentence, identify the author, the title and the author's thesis (or main point).
- Then, report the main points that the author uses to support their thesis, one section at a time.
- Write in paragraph form, including clear transition words between major points.
- Use your own words.
- Do not include your personal opinions and interpretations.
- Usually organize the ideas in the same order used in the original.

Two kinds of Summaries

There are two kinds of summaries: one where you mention the author several times throughout the summary and one where the author is only mentioned in brackets at the end of the summary. You need

to find out from your instructor which kind is expected. Examples of these two types of summaries are included below:

1) Author included

The author's name and the title of the article are noted in the first sentence. Throughout the summary, the author is mentioned several times to let the reader know you are still summarizing. These references are underlined below to help you see them better. Also, please note that this is not the complete summary; it is only several lines of a summary to show what it would look like with references to the author:

In the article "Social and Economic Change in New France," Smith examines the positive impact of the fur trade and the development of Native trade alliances on the social climate and the economy of New France ... Smith suggests that the Metis played an integral role in the development of a stable economy ... According to Smith, the role of Native women in particular is largely ignored in history.

2) Author not included

The author's name does not appear in the following summary, neither in the first sentence nor throughout the summary. Instead, a citation is used at the end of the paragraph to identify and give credit to the author of the reading. Notice that this summary has the same information as in the previous box, but without the references to the author.

The success of the fur trade and the establishment of Native trade alliances positively affected the social and economic development of New France. . . . The Metis were largely responsible for the strengthening of New France's economy. . . . Even though Metis women were greatly involved with the fur trade, their point of view is largely ignored in most historical accounts (Smith 106).*

* This reference to the article is in MLA style. Because styles for identifying sources vary, you should ask your instructor which style to use for the summary you are writing.

Model Summary

An example of a summary is provided on the following pages to show you how a reading can be marked up, outlined, and summarized. Ask yourself the following questions to help you notice how this example follows the suggestions made in this handout:

1. What different kinds of notations does the student use to mark up the reading? How do the notations help uncover the meaning and main points of the reading?
2. How closely does the outline follow the notations made on the reading?
3. What does the student who created this outline/summary do to show exact wording that she copied?
4. In the summary, what method is used to make reference to the author (Suzuki)?
5. What are some of the differences between the outline and the summary? Why is the summary more useful than the outline to show the main ideas in the Suzuki article?
6. Find some examples of how the student uses her own wording to paraphrase Suzuki's ideas. Do you think the student plagiarizes anywhere in her summary?
7. Do you think the summary matches each of the summary criteria listed on the first page of this handout

Transporting food can cost the earth

By David Suzuki*

When it comes to food, buying local has been the mantra of environmental groups for years. After all, it's pretty easy to conclude that transporting fruits and vegetables from one side of the globe to the other isn't very good for the planet.

Now, a comprehensive new analysis of the true costs of the way we produce, purchase and consume food has found that while international transport of food does have an impact, when it comes to environmental damage, the big culprit is domestic transportation. Researchers in the United Kingdom used data from previous studies to estimate the hidden costs of conventional agriculture in that country. These costs include things like government subsidies; exhaust pollution from transport trucks, railroads and car travel; heat-trapping emissions that cause global warming; and infrastructure, such as roads.

Their results, published in the journal *Food Policy*, show that international ship and air travel currently contribute a relatively miniscule amount to the overall hidden costs of our food. By far, domestic transportation from the farm to the retailer and then from the shop to the consumer's home has the greatest impact - accounting for nearly half of the hidden costs.

Raw distance, it turns out, is not always the deciding factor in determining the adverse effects of transportation. Shipping by water, researchers note, has lower impact than shipping by road. Transport by air, on the other hand, has the greatest impact of all. Right now, hidden costs for the international transport of food are relatively low because much of this food is shipped by boat, or in the cargo holds of passenger planes. If we start to ship food by air more often, these costs could increase dramatically.

But if domestic transportation costs in a country as small as the U.K. are high, then the hidden costs of food transportation in Canada may be much higher.

Consider a box of cereal, for example, which may start with wheat from the Prairies, transported to Ontario for processing with other ingredients from all over the country, put into a box made in Quebec and then transported to British Columbia for retail sales, where it will be picked up by a consumer driving an SUV.

Because of our reliance on fossil fuels for transportation needs, each of these stages has hidden costs. In fact, even if we buy local food, but all of us drive to the store to pick it up, there are increased hidden costs. So, does this mean big-box chains that sell in huge quantities may unintentionally help the environment by reducing the number of trips taken to purchase groceries? According to the research, that doesn't appear to be the case. Consumers in the U.K. are actually making more grocery shopping trips and driving greater distances to make them than they were 20 years ago - before the rise of the megamart.

Another hidden cost of our food is taxpayer-funded government subsidies that prop up unsustainable agricultural practices. Switching to organic agriculture, the researchers conclude, would lead to big benefits in terms of overall costs to society. Of course, the benefits of organic agriculture in terms of environmental impact are greatly reduced if the food has to travel by road a great distance to reach the consumer.

So what food-shopping patterns will yield the most benefit to the environment and society? Looking at the data, walking, biking or taking public transit to buy organic, locally grown (within 20km) food would be the best choice. Grocery delivery services also help a great deal by reducing the overall number of vehicle trips. Even choosing a fuel-efficient vehicle and reducing the number of trips helps.

Unfortunately, suburban sprawl is rapidly eating up some of Canada's best farmland - which also happens to be located near urban centers. For our food to be sustainable, governments at all levels must work to curb sprawl and support local food systems.

* Permission to use article granted by Suzuki foundation.

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Canada example of transport cycle

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2 Hidden Costs: 1 shoppers drive cars a lot

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2 unsustainable farming practices

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Solutions: A) Consumer - use better transport - buy local foods

Unfortunately, suburban sprawl is rapidly eating up some of Canada's best farmland - which also happens to be located near urban centers. For our food to be sustainable, governments at all levels must work to curb sprawl and support local food systems.

B) Government - stop urban sprawl - support local food production

Summary - UK research:

Now a comprehensive new analysis of the true costs of the way we produce, purchase and consume food has found that while international transport of food does have an impact, when it comes to environmental damage, the big culprit is domestic transportation.

Thesis

Researchers in the United Kingdom used data from previous studies to estimate the hidden costs of conventional agriculture in that country. These costs include things like government subsidies, exhaust pollution from transport trucks, railroads and car travel; heat-trapping emissions that cause global warming; and infrastructure, such as roads.

Hidden Costs

Findings:

Their results, published in the journal Food Policy, show that international ship and air travel currently contribute a relatively miniscule amount to the overall hidden costs of our food. By far domestic transportation from the farm to the retailer and then from the shop to the consumer's home has the greatest impact - accounting for nearly half of the hidden costs.

Raw distance, it turns out, is not always the deciding factor in determining the adverse effects of transportation. Shipping by water, researchers note, has lower impact than shipping by road. Transport by air, on the other hand, has the greatest impact of all. Right now, hidden costs for the international transport of food are relatively low because much of this food is shipped by boat, or in the cargo holds of passenger planes. If we start to ship food by air more often, these costs could increase dramatically.

shipping by water best by air worst

Application to Canada:

But if domestic transportation costs in a country as small as the U.K. are high, then the hidden costs of food transportation in Canada may be much higher.

Hidden costs worse in Canada - vast distances



Outline

Thesis: Because local production and transport of food cause higher “hidden costs” than moving food internationally, the local level is where significant changes need to be made.

1. British Research shows:
 - a. International transportation of food adds very little to “hidden costs.”
 - b. Domestic transport = 50% of these costs
 - i. from farm to market
 - ii. from market to home
 - c. Transportation by water costs the least; land transportation and especially air transportation cost most
 - d. In a vast nation like Canada, these costs are especially high
2. Where are some of the “hidden costs”?
 - a. Many car trips to buy food: consumers make more trips farther distances to get groceries at large “megamarts” than when they shopped more locally
 - b. Rather than supporting highly beneficial local organic farming, Government subsidizes unsustainable farming practices, (the benefit of organic farming much less if the food is transported large distances over land)
3. What are some solutions?
 - a. Consumers should:
 - i. make fewer trips to grocery stores
 - ii. use less gasoline to make grocery trips (walk, bike, public transit, smaller cars)
 - b. Government should:
 - i. stop urban sprawl because this uses up local farm land
 - ii. support local farming

Summary

In “Transporting Food Can Cost the Earth,” Suzuki argues that, because local production and transport of food cause higher “hidden costs” than moving food internationally, the local level is where significant changes need to be made. He summarizes British research which shows that the international transport of agricultural products, much of which happens by boat, does not significantly affect the “hidden costs” of moving food. In contrast, moving food products by land and especially by air adds significantly to the costs. Suzuki suggests that, in a vast nation like Canada, these costs are especially high because so much fossil fuel is needed to transport food by land and air over large distances. Returning to the research, Suzuki points out that a major cost is the way consumers use fossil fuel to drive to and from stores. Another cost is government support for “unsustainable agricultural practices.” Suzuki suggests that consumers can lessen the environmental impact of grocery shopping by choosing ways to go shopping that use no or little gasoline. Suzuki also calls on governments to support local food production by limiting “urban sprawl” because it takes over local farm land.