



The Summary – Syllabus

Course Description: Good summarizing skills are beneficial to so many kinds of writing. This course will introduce your student to the basics of creating a summary. Students will learn how to read a text, search for details, determine the main idea, express these ideas in their own words, and finally rewrite an original in fewer words: in a summary!

Course Outline:

Week One: What Is a Summary?

Week Two: The Main Idea

Week Three: The Most Important Details

Week Four: In Your Own Words

Week Five: Writing Concisely

Week Six: A Longer Text

Week Seven: Outlining the Summary

Week Eight: The Final Summary

Grading Information: All assignments will be graded using the *The Beginning Writer* grading rubric and averaged to receive a final course grade.



The Summary

Lesson Four: In Your Own Words

SAMPLE LESSON

After you have found the topic, main idea, and most important details of an original text, you need to **determine how to rewrite these things in your own words**. Remember, a summary still needs to express the original topic, main idea, and most important details, but all of this must be done in your own words. You cannot copy the original.

Rewriting an original text in our own words is called **paraphrasing**. When we do not properly paraphrase, we are **plagiarizing**.

A NOTE ON PLAGIARISM –

Plagiarism is when we copy some or all of the exact words, sentence structure, or paragraph structure of another writer and call it our own. Remember, as we mentioned in Lesson 1, plagiarism is a form of stealing; thus, it is illegal and disrespectful. It is something we want to avoid whenever we are writing. However, plagiarism is easy to fall into when paraphrasing.

Remember, to avoid plagiarism, your goal is always to write the original in your own words. However, even when attempting to paraphrase, there are two common mistakes that students make.

1. They change or delete a few words in the original but make no other changes.
2. They switch around the structure of the sentences but make no other changes.

Let us study these problems using some examples.

ORIGINAL TEXT:

- Grandma Moses was a famous American folk artist, despite the fact that she did not begin painting seriously until she was 78 years old.

WORD CHANGES:

- Grandma Moses was a popular American folk painter, even though she did not start painting intently until she was 78 years old.

DELETED WORDS:

- Grandma Moses was an American artist, despite the fact that she did not begin painting until she was 78.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE CHANGES:

- Despite the fact that she did not begin painting seriously until she was 78 years old, Grandma Moses was a famous American folk artist.

None of the attempted paraphrases are true paraphrases. No, they are not exact copies of the original, but some or all of the words or sentence structure are the same as in the original. This is where students get into trouble. They think they are avoiding plagiarism, because they have changed or deleted a few words or switched around the parts of a sentence. However, each of these paraphrases is very much plagiarism.

PROPER PARAPHRASING –

In order to properly paraphrase an original, you must change words, sentence structure, and even paragraph structure (when paraphrasing a paragraph or composition).

First, we will learn how to **replace suitable words of the original text with synonyms**. If you don't know, a synonym is a word or phrase that expresses the same or a similar meaning as another word or phrase. For example, *big* and *large* are synonyms.

So, how can we apply the use of synonyms to our paraphrases?

Look at this example again:

- Grandma Moses was a famous American folk artist, despite the fact that she did not begin painting seriously until she was 78 years old.

Topic: Grandma Moses

Main Idea: She was a famous painter

Most Important Details: She was a folk artist, and she didn't start painting until she was 78.

Words/Phrases to Replace: famous, artist, despite the fact, begin, seriously

By changing some words and phrases, we come up with the following sentence, which we showed you above. Please remember, this is *not* a true paraphrase. We have only changed some of the words, so technically, this is still considered plagiarism. However, changing words is the first step to a successful paraphrase.

WORD CHANGES:

- Grandma Moses was a popular American folk painter, even though she did not start painting intently until she was 78 years old.

There are not necessarily right or wrong answers when it comes to finding words/phrases that can be replaced with synonyms. The purpose of finding and changing such words/phrases is to get you started on the right track with writing an original in your own words. (Remember, this is just the first step!) It is an opportunity to practice utilizing synonyms. Do not stress about trying to find the perfect words. Just look for some of the most important nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs that help explain the text's topic, main idea, and most important details.

After you have considered some word/phrase changes, ***the next step to writing an original in your own words is to change the sentence structure.*** That means you might move a phrase from the end of a sentence to the beginning. You might move a phrase from here to there. You might turn a compound sentence into a simple sentence.

Using the example above, we will rearrange the structure of this sentence and continue to change some words or phrases in order to write the original in our own words.

Examples –

- Even though she did not start painting until she was 78, Grandma Moses became a well-known American folk painter.
- Grandma Moses did not begin painting until she was nearly 80 years old, but she still became a very popular American artist, known for her folk paintings.
- Even though Grandma Moses' folk paintings are well-known, it might be a surprise that she didn't begin painting until she was 78!
- It was not until she was 78 years old that Grandma Moses started painting with intent. Still, she is known as a very popular American folk painter.

Now, there is one other problem we must address. When students begin paraphrasing paragraphs, we see this problem pop up. Let's take a look:

ORIGINAL TEXT:

- Rainbows are a beautiful display of colors caused by the separation of light. Rainbows contain seven colors: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. Rainbows often appear in the sky after rainstorms, but they can be seen on sunny days too. No matter when or where rainbows appear, it is impossible not to notice how beautiful they are.

ATTEMPTED PARAPHRASE:

- Made by the dispersion of light, rainbows are a stunning group of colors. Most of us know that rainbows are made up of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. We often see rainbows after storms, but sometimes we also see rainbows when it is sunny. Rainbows are beautiful whenever and wherever they appear.

This attempted paraphrase might seem really good. It is a good start. However, the problem with this paraphrase is that the order of the ideas and the paragraph's structure is identical to the original. The student has simply rewritten each sentence while still placing all of the same information in the exact same order as the original.

So how do we avoid this?

Although you may start your paraphrase process by *looking at* the original text to consider key word/phrase changes and sentence structure changes, eventually, you should be able to *put the original text away* (no peeking!) while you are paraphrasing.

Putting the original text away helps you focus on expressing the topic, main idea, and most important details without simply revising the original structure. Putting the original text away shows that you have understood it enough so that you are able to express the ideas without having to refer to the original. This demonstration of understanding is the whole point of paraphrasing in the first place.

Let's look at a better example of a paragraph paraphrase:

BETTER PARAPHRASE:

- We have all seen a rainbow – that beautiful group of colors that we know so well. Rainbows are made by the dispersion of light and often appear after rainstorms. However, we are sometimes surprised by rainbows on sunny days too. With their brilliant display of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet, rainbows are a stunning part of nature at any time.

A truly successful paraphrase is completed in the following steps:

1. **Read the original text.**
2. **Determine the topic and main idea.**
3. **Determine the most important details.**
4. **Put the original away, so that you cannot read it or look at it.**
5. **Write *your own text* that is a similar length to the original, stating the topic, main idea, and most important details.**
6. **While you may adopt your own writing style, remember that a paraphrase should remain in the same tone as the original. If the original text is explanatory, your paraphrase should also be explanatory—not become narrative, descriptive, or persuasive (opinion-based).**

By combining a mixture of word/phrase changes with sentence structure changes, and practicing rewriting an original without looking at it, you can learn to successfully paraphrase. Ultimately, you may end up rearranging phrases, changing words, deleting words or phrases, adding words or phrases, and even

changing the type and structure of a sentence. ***Remember, when paraphrasing, your goal is to express the topic, main idea, and most important detail(s), showing that you have understood the original text.***

Now, let's practice!

Assignment 4A: Write a paragraph briefly explaining what plagiarism is, why it is wrong, and how to avoid it when paraphrasing.

Assignment 4B: Read the following text again. You have now found the topic, main idea, and most important details. Next, choose a suitable synonym for each highlighted word in the text.

Benjamin Franklin was an American **writer**, inventor, and scientist of the 1700s. He is **well-known** as one of America's Founding Fathers, having **helped draft** the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. **Apart from** government work, Franklin is known to have invented the lightning rod, the Franklin stove, and bifocals. He was also a **prominent** writer of the day, publishing the **infamous** "Poor Richard's Almanac." **In all his efforts**, we can see that Benjamin Franklin was a **wise, hard-working** man willing to help his neighbors and country. **(88 words)**

Assignment 4C: Finally, using the topic, main idea, most important details, and word/phrase changes from the previous assignment, rewrite the above original text *in your own words*. If you can, put the original away and use only your notes to guide you in writing the paraphrase. Since this is a paraphrase, your rewrite should be similar in length to the original text. Additionally, the original text is explanatory, so remember to write your paraphrase in the same tone.