

## SUMMARIZING AS AN IMPORTANT SKILL FOR BUSINESS ENGLISH STUDENTS

SVETLANA BACINSCHII<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

*The teaching of academic writing skills strives for developing students' skills for continuous use of academic English to effectively operate in various areas of language use. Writing remains one of the most important ways to be assessed in University, so it is a key skill to master. As a competence, writing is a difficult task in itself, but it is made even more challenging in University due to the specialised nature of academic discourse. Academic writing differs from other types of writing such as journalistic or creative writing. In most forms of academic writing, a detached and objective approach is required. Summarising is an important skill in academic writing. A good summary can verify that students are understanding each other, can make communications more efficient, and can ensure that the most important elements of communication are depicted and exploited.*

**Key words:** *academic writing, difficulties, plagiarism, skills, summarising*

**JEL CLASIFICATION:** A20, A23, A29.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The article aims to focus on the importance of summarising skills for business English students. Such skills are invaluable as they help students learn more effectively. Writing skill is one of the four basic skills in English that plays an important role in operating with the language. Reading is also the most important of the four skills in English as foreign language. Writing offers the learners the opportunity to experiment with the language and try different constructions. Being able to write a good summary also demonstrates that scholars have fully understood the text they are reading and they can complete the different stages of their academic writing task. This study thus provides advice, strategies, factors that cause the difficulties and the solutions to deal with difficulties in writing a summary.

Summarising is an important skill in academic writing. It allows students to extract the most important points from an academic text and rewrite them in their own words, in a brief form. Such skills are helpful when they are note taking and researching for an essay. Being able to write a good summary also demonstrates that they have fully understood the text they are reading.

The process of summarising involves important reading, thinking and writing skills that are essential in academic writing.

Summarising a text in academic writing is important because it:

- gives a general idea of the key points of a text
- provides proof for the students' academic arguments, conclusions and evaluations
- shows the students' understanding of a text
- demonstrates the learners' awareness of the wider context of a topic or issue

The reason lectures use summarizing is to help students “focus on the heart of the matter” [Jones R., 2007]. Lecturers want their students to capture the most important idea or message. However using this strategy will help students be responsible for evoking what the text was about and sharing what they consider it was about.

Research done by Block and Parris, states what comprehension strategies should be taught, how, and why. It states that every year students need to learn, recap, and use 45 different strategies for reading and reading comprehension. One of those is summarizing, because teachers need to use strategies that permit students to understand the content and encourage their thinking. Although summarizing is usually written, it can also be used verbally and visually.

A good summary should be brief, complete, logical, and independent.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Magistru, Lector Universitar, MD-2005, Republica Moldova, mun. Chișinău, str. Mitropolit Gavriil Banulescu-Bodoni, 61. Academia de Studii Economice a Moldovei, Tel:(+373 22) 2241. E-mail [svetlana.butuc@yahoo.com](mailto:svetlana.butuc@yahoo.com), web site: [www.ase.md](http://www.ase.md).*

- Unlike paraphrasing, summarising condenses information. A brief summary should remove repetitions, although the author restates the same ideas. The summary should be much shorter than the source.
- A complete summary should present all the important points from the original passage. Students must note them down in a list and then review all the ideas, and include them in their summary.
- A logical summary should make sense as a piece of writing in its own right; it should not sound like an incoherent compilation of ideas.
- An independent summary implies that it should not imitate the author of the text. On the contrary, a personal voice should be maintained throughout the summary. Students should not simply quote the author but use their own words to state their understanding of what they have read, as the summary is based on their interpretation of the writer's ideas. However, they should avoid misrepresentation by using comments or criticisms of their own. Thus, summaries should only contain the original author's viewpoint, not the students' opinion.

## 2. RULES TO WRITE A SUMMARY

Firstly, students must read through the original text to understand its overall meaning. They should get a general idea of the subject as well as the author's attitude. Students may identify the main idea of an article by using the following methods:

1. Gather information from the title.
2. Identify the place it was published, as this can help determine the intended audience.
3. Determine the date of publication.
4. Determine the type of essay (expository, argumentative, literary, scholarly etc.)
5. Take note of the tone of the piece.
6. Identify certain notions or arguments that seem to be repeated throughout.

Secondly, they have to capture the main ideas of the passage by stressing them and ignoring any pointless facts, descriptions, opinions or examples that do not affect the core message. All statistics, dates and names, quotations, details and comparisons, examples, opinions, and decorating expressions have to be excluded unless they are vital for the understanding of the text.

Thirdly, the summary is usually written in the present tense, but past events may be reported in the past, future events may be reported in the future. Statements or questions, which were made in the past, may be reported in the past tense or the past perfect. Statements and questions that were made in the past but concern the future may be reported in the conditional.

Next, students have to read a second time to identify the main points. They can either do this paragraph by paragraph, or heading by heading / sub-heading. They should be able to identify the topic sentences. These are usually the first sentences of each paragraph and they give the main idea for the paragraph (with the following sentences supporting this main idea). In addition, they should look for the concluding sentence in the paragraph, as this often summarises the paragraph.

Ready to write – at this point, the student's first draft is virtually prepared. They can use the thesis statement as the introductory sentence of your summary, and your other sentences can make up the body. They have to make sure that they are in order. Moreover, they should add some transition words (*then, however, also, moreover*) that help with the overall structure and flow of the summary.

Then, students must reread their summary and make certain that they have accurately represented the author's ideas and main points. Furthermore, it is important to make sure that the information directly cited from the original source is cited correctly. Also students should check to make sure that their text does not contain their own commentary on the piece.

Lastly, once they are certain that the summary is accurate, they should revise it for style, grammar, and punctuation.

## 3. SUMMARY VS. PARAPHRASE

Many students are confused on how to do a paraphrase and summary in their paper, simply because they do not know the difference between them. The difference between the two is what their objectives are. As mentioned above a **summary** is a brief summing up of the main points of a

statement or narrative, while a **paraphrase** is the rewording of something written or spoken, especially with the aim of making the sense clearer. A paraphrase may be longer, shorter, or of the same length as the original passage.

Thus, paraphrasing and summarizing are essential techniques for an effective and efficient essay. These are an utter must when dealing with scientific concepts. Both paraphrasing and summarizing are allowed and accepted till the original source is stated, and only till the work is not copied and is free from any kind of plagiarism. The examples below illustrate the difference between summarising and paraphrasing.

The original passage:

*Students frequently overuse direct quotation in taking notes, and as a result they overuse quotations in the final [research] paper. Probably only about 10% of your final manuscript should appear as directly quoted matter. Therefore, you should strive to limit the amount of exact transcribing of source materials while taking notes.*

*Lester, James D. Writing Research Papers. 2nd ed. (1976): 46-47.*

A legitimate paraphrase:

*In research papers students often quote excessively, failing to keep quoted material down to a desirable level. Since the problem usually originates during note taking, it is essential to minimize the material recorded verbatim (Lester 46-47).*

An acceptable summary:

*Students should take just a few notes in direct quotation from sources to help minimize the amount of quoted material in a research paper (Lester 46-47).*

To sum up:

1. Paraphrasing is writing any particular text in your own words while summarizing is mentioning only the main points of any work in your own words.
2. Paraphrasing is almost equal to or somewhat less than the original text while summarizing is substantially shorter than the original.
3. Paraphrasing may be done for the purpose of simplifying the original work while summarizing is done to mention only the major points without any kind of explanation about the matter.

Some common errors committed by students when summarising are:

- They write down everything, not separating out the important points
- They write down almost nothing, not knowing how to identify the important points
- They may copy word for word, instead of using their own words

Moreover many students have difficulties on writing a summary of an English text due to the language aspect or because of the problem in vocabulary and grammar. The problem in vocabulary and grammar makes them difficult to understand the content of the source text. [Grabe W., Stoller F.L., 1997] stated that students are faced with an unfamiliar text in the foreign language; the first challenge seems to be it vocabulary.

Another barrier in producing a summary is the lack of knowledge about the steps in writing a summary. They do not understand the steps or instructions on writing a summary while the steps in summary writing are very important. According to [Tomitch L. M. B., 2000], procedural knowledge is knowing “how to” or being able to extract the main ideas in the text and write a coherent summary.

Time for summarizing the text is also an issue that causes the difficulties for students. In other words, the student needs much time to finish a summary. This happens because they have difficulties in summarizing due to the problems in comprehending the text. Most of the students spent more time in comprehending the source the text.

In conclusion, the students face different problems in writing a summary of an English text and the major barriers are language, procedure, and time.

#### 4. SUMMARIZE WITHOUT PLAGIARIZING

When students finally have a topic, on which they are going to write their paper, the first thing they should do is to decide what exactly to write down. Although a topic itself reflects the main idea of the content, it does not always disclose the subject completely. That is why students should make up a clue and plan the line of thinking. It will settle on what the order of events in their paper will be.

The easiest way to find out what to write is to use someone else's experience as a reference. After reviewing works of other authors, you will find ideas, which satisfy your own point of view. Finally, they will have a good example consult while writing their own account. The only question is how to summarize without plagiarizing.

Plagiarism is when you borrow the author's language, sentence structure, or ideas without properly citing the work in your essay. You cannot use the results of another's research or material, specific arrangement of the material, list of steps and conclusions in an experiment, artistic concept without acknowledging the original creator and source without proper citation.

One of the main requirements to any paper is its originality. Below are **stated some ways to avoid plagiarism in academic writing**.

##### Step 1

Students should read the reference very attentively and make sure that they comprehend what it is all about. Understanding of the information is a precondition for being able to acknowledge it and put in their own words.

##### Step 2

Now students should write an introductory part of their paper. They should decide whether they are going to share the opinion as their own or make it clear that they used a reference material. When using the exact word or words of an author, no matter whether they are taken from a book, song, magazine, website, or other written source, they **must** place those words within quotation marks and credit the source of those words.

##### Step 3

Write down the plot without looking into a reference material at all. Only this way they will be able to avoid plagiarism in their text. In case they cannot remember something significant, they must read the entire reference again, than put it aside and try to write their variant one more time. Students should avoid paraphrasing a sentence by sentence.

##### Step 4

If they mentioned a reference in the paper, it is mandatory to place a citation right after the last sentence and they have to point the source and the author's name to avoid plagiarism.

Below is a passage taken from Raymond S. Nickerson's "How We Know-and Sometimes Misjudge-What Others Know: Imputing One's Own Knowledge to Others." *Psychological Bulletin* 125.6 (1999): p737.

Original source:

*In order to communicate effectively with other people, one must have a reasonably accurate idea of what they do and do not know that is pertinent to the communication. Treating people as though they have knowledge that they do not have can result in miscommunication and perhaps embarrassment. On the other hand, a fundamental rule of conversation, at least according to a Gricean view, is that one generally does not convey to others information that one can assume they already have.*

Plagiarised version:

*For effective communication, it is necessary to have a fairly accurate idea of what our listeners know or do not know that is pertinent to the communication. If we assume that people know something they do not, then miscommunication and perhaps embarrassment may result (Nickerson, 1999).*

This is an example of an attempt to summarise that uses many of the exact words and phrases. Direct quotes need quotation marks. The writer has used too many of Nickerson's original words

and phrases such as "effective communication", "accurate idea", "know or do not know", "pertinent", "miscommunication", and "embarrassment". Note that the passage doesn't have an opening tag to indicate where use of the Nickerson's material begins. A citation at the end of a paragraph is not sufficient to indicate what is being credited to Nickerson.

Proper Summary:

*Nickerson (1999) argues that clear communication hinges upon what an audience does and does not know. It is crucial to assume the audience has neither too much nor too little knowledge of the subject or the communication may be inhibited by either confusion or offence (p. 737).*

Notice that the writer both paraphrases Nickerson's ideas about effective communication and compresses them into two sentences.

How can students avoid plagiarism? In many cases, students who find themselves accused of plagiarising often have done so unintentionally. Poor organisation and time management, as well as a failure to understand good academic practice, are often a reason. It might therefore be helpful to note the following points:

- Students should manage their time and plan their work – students should make sure that they have enough time to prepare, read and write
- When paraphrasing an author's text, students have to use their own words and a sentence structure sufficiently different from the original text
- In their notes, it is important to highlight any direct quotations they want to use in the assignment - this will help to ensure they use quotation marks with an appropriate reference when writing up the work
- They should allot enough time to check the final draft for possible referencing errors or omissions: for example, check that all their in-text citations have a corresponding entry in their reference list, and vice versa

## 5. THE IMPORTANCE OF SUMMARIZING

Why is summarizing important? The skill of summarizing is an indispensable yet often ignored step in the communication process. Whether students understand it or not, summarizing can add an innovative dimension to verbal and written communication both in a business and personal situation.

Summarizing helps students to comprehend knowledge, transferring it to long-term memory significantly because it leads students to

- a) reading to understand
- b) to distinguish important ideas
- c) to express the information by using their own words.

Summarising is an important skill, which is often used when researching, gathering, or presenting information. Many assignments produced by students at college will draw upon important ideas, writings and research of experts in their study area. No doubt, the work of various writers will be included in your their assignments to support claims or provide evidence of their own writing though, usage of such sources must be done accurately in order to avoid plagiarism.

Excellent summaries are valuable because they keep busy readers informed without demanding more time than necessary to get the information they need. Today we generate and exchange information at a volume and speed that never diminish. Administrators may deal with reports, proposals, documents and briefing notes that together easily reach hundreds of pages. The only way busy administrators can manage the flood of information is to rely on effective summaries that can efficiently present the most important information.

A good summary tells readers enough about a topic that they can decide whether they need to read more.

Thus, summarizing is an important skill for students to learn because:

- It gives them practice in expressing key ideas and finding main ideas
- It is a way for them to monitor their own understanding

- It is a way for them to practice decision making and learn about sequencing
- it can be used in many different subjects, such as science, math, and social studies
- it can be used in real life situations, through college, and in a job

## CONCLUSION

Of the four language skills, writing is considered as one of the most important skills, mainly in an academic environment such as in schools, colleges and institutions of higher learning. Among the different genres of writing students have to undertake in the course of their academic career, summary writing seems to be one of the most difficult to master. Summary writing is an important skill for students to learn in ESL. This allows them to paraphrase and summarize what they have read at the same time interpreting what they have understood from the passage. This is an important exercise to enhancing their comprehension skills. Although summarising is a complex activity that can impose an overwhelming cognitive load on students [Kirkland M. R., 1991], in an academic setting it is a highly essential and necessary skill.

One of the main requirements to any paper is its originality. Meanwhile the main problem here is that students listen not to understand and realize, but to repeat and plagiarize. Accurate referencing is important in all academic work. Students will need to understand the general principles to apply when citing sources and take steps to avoid plagiarism.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Block, C., C. & Parris, S., R. *Comprehension Instruction, Second Edition: Research-Based Best Practices*, Guilford Press, 2008, ISBN-10: 1593857004, ISBN-13: 978-1593857004
2. Grabe, W., Stoller, F.L., *Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 98-122
3. Jones, R., *Strategies for Reading Comprehension: Summarizing*, 2007, available at <http://www.readingquest.org/strat/summarize.html>
4. Kirkland, M.R., Saunders, M.A.P., *Maximizing student performance in summary writing: managing cognitive load*, 1991, *Tesol Quaterly*, pp.105-122. Available at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.2307/3587030>
5. Neville, C., *The Complete Guide to Referencing and Avoiding Plagiarism*, 2nd ed. Maidenhead: Open UP, Berkshire: Mc Graw Hill, Open University Press, 2007
6. Nickerson, R. S., *How We Know-and Sometimes Misjudge-What Others Know: Imputing One's Own Knowledge to Others*, *Psychological Bulletin* 125.6, 1999, p. 737. Available at <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/2850/3fb675e59d00a8cca49bc37d474e07888ae2.pdf>
7. Tomitch, L. M. B., *Teaching main ideas: Are we really teaching?*, *Linguagem & Ensino*, 2000, pp. 45-53