

# Teaching Academic Writing: Summarizing

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### Introduction

‘Summarizing’ is an important skill used very frequently in our lives. It is used both in formal and informal settings, in interpersonal communication as well as in intellectual or academic communication. We share with our family the summary of the movie that we saw or the party that we attended; we share with our friends the highlights of the cricket match or a stage performance they missed; and we share with our friends the central idea of a lecture that we heard. Summarizing is done inadvertently all the time.

In the academic sphere, however, it takes a very significant turn as students require to summarize the texts that they have read for revision later on or the research articles they need to refer to in their writings. Students need to summarize the lecture that they heard in a classroom or a notice or an announcement that others missed but is important. This skill, though very important, is rarely taught to the students. They are often tested though, in writing précis or summaries of comprehension passages.

This article summarizes how students can be taught this significant academic writing skill in a procedural manner. It is based on workshops conducted on Developing Academic Writing Skills of undergraduate students in Gujarat.

### Objectives

To help students to:

- Identify the main idea/central theme of a text;
- Identify key ideas or arguments supporting the main idea;
- Recognise the supporting details, explanations, and exemplification of the key ideas or arguments; and
- Summarize a text in their own words using the central theme and the key ideas.

**Duration:** 1 ½ to 2 hours

### Texts needed

- a) Five nursery rhymes which are familiar
- b) Two/three short reading texts of about 50 words each
- c) Three longer reading texts of about 100-150 words each

### Methodology

1. Define ‘summary’ and ‘summarizing’.
2. Help the students to establish the relevance and significance of summarizing in their lives, especially in academic writing.
3. Ask the students to read the text carefully twice. In the second reading ask them to underline important words and phrases.
4. Ask them to think of the answer to the question: “What is this text about?”.

5. Ask them to re-read the text and see if their idea of the text is adequate.
6. Help them identify the central idea of the text (you can use the nursery rhymes here. The main idea is easy to identify as the text is very short. For example, Humpty Dumpty fell and broke but could not be repaired).
7. Take one of the shorter texts and help them locate important words.
8. Suggest a few summaries and ask them to evaluate which one is the most effective and why.
9. Group them and give them other short texts to identify the main idea and the key points or arguments. Through a process of discussion they would be able to develop better understanding of the text and its key ideas.
10. Make the students consolidate this information in a sentence or two as the summary.
11. Move around the class interacting with, monitoring, motivating, and facilitating student- groups in this activity.
12. Ask a few groups to volunteer sharing with the class the summary they have come up with.
13. Discuss with the class and suggest what improvements they could make in their summaries.
14. Give them the longer texts and ask them to write down the central theme and key ideas of the passage.
15. Ask them to exchange notes with their neighbours and make improvements in their summaries.
16. Emphasize writing the summary in their own words using as few words as possible from the text.
17. Ask them to write down the summary of the text in their own words.

#### **Learning Outcomes**

1. Once the learners are able to establish the significance of summarizing in their academic context, they become very motivated and receptive to this skill.
2. They learn to identify the central idea as well as the key ideas or arguments.
3. They learn to compress and express the main thought of the text.
4. They learn how to avoid using textual language and use their own language to summarize.

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