

The summary

Definition

A summary is a piece of writing in which you state, in as few words as possible, the main ideas of the passage to be summarised. It is a good way to master the content of a text and show how well you understand it.

In summarising a few paragraphs or a brief article, you should not exceed one fifth of the original. For longer works such as chapters of books or whole books, the summary should be much shorter than a fifth of the original.(one tenth is an approximate indication)

Procedure for drafting a summary

1. Work through the text paragraph by paragraph to identify its parts (sections). These are normally single paragraphs or groups of paragraphs focusing on a single topic (main idea).
2. Write a one or two-sentence summary of each section you identify. Focus on the main point of the section, omitting details such as facts and examples.
3. Write a sentence or two stating the author's central idea.
4. Write a full paragraph (or more) that begins with the central idea (as an introduction to the paragraph) and supports it with the sentences that summarise sections of the work. The paragraph should concisely and accurately state the whole meaning of the text.
5. Use your own words. In writing a summary, you recreate the meaning of the original text in a way that makes sense to you and to your reader.

Example

Original text

'At a typical football match we are likely to see players committing deliberate fouls, often behind the referee's back. They might try to take a throw-in or a free kick from an incorrect but more advantageous positions in defiance of the clearly stated rules of the game. They sometimes challenge the rulings of the referee or linesmen in an offensive way which often deserves exemplary punishment or even sending off. No wonder spectators fight amongst themselves, damage stadiums, or take the law into their own hands by invading the pitch in the hope of affecting the outcome of the match.' [100 words]

Summary

Unsportsmanlike behaviour by footballers may cause hooliganism among spectators. [9 words]

Source <http://www.mantex.co.uk/samples/summary.htm>

PRACTICE

Summarise the following text in no more than 120 words (10 lines)

'My job as a waitress'

While working my way through college, I have held some dull and difficult jobs. I have spent a summer picking tomatoes in hot and seemingly endless fields. I have sold toys during the Christmas rush to screaming children and harassed parents in the crowded basement of a large department store. I have worked through the night sorting out mail in a cold and dreary post office. However, none of these jobs was as bad as my work as a waitress in a restaurant/ice cream shop. The work there was physically hard, the pay poor, and most of all, the working conditions were deplorable.

First of all, the job made great demands on my energy and endurance. From 4:30 in the afternoon until one or two in the morning, I spent most of my time on my feet waiting on customers, walking from counter to kitchen to table, carrying trays heavy with plates of food and giant ice cream sundaes, sodas and shakes. The restaurant was a popular hangout for teenagers whose need for another straw, another spoon, another glass of water kept me in almost constant motion. Families were also drawn to the place and overflowed the booths, their little ones spewing malted magic down the seats, often followed by broken glass -targets for the broom and mop that I wielded in my 'spare' time. In fact, in the rare moments when business slowed down, I was expected to mop the entire floor and to clean down walls as well as to polish the extensive fountain area. In addition to waiting tables, I was required to work in the kitchen some of the time and to make ice cream orders for all of my customers. My hands and arms ached by the end of the night from scooping hard ice cream. When I went home, I had to soak my sore body in a tub for at least a half hour before I could sleep.

The physical hardship might not have been so hard if the pay had not been so poor. I was paid the minimum wage at that time, which was \$1.25 an hour, and on a good night. I made another two or three dollars in tips. Because of the low pay, I often worked overtime on weekends to increase my paycheck. I was naive and didn't at first realize that weekends attracted the 'big spenders' who promised substantial tips that rarely materialized for extra attention and faster service. Although I catered to them and flew as fast as I could, when I cleared their tables I might find a dime or a quarter and sometimes nothing at all as tip for a table of four and a bill of fifteen dollars or more. Of course, in addition to longer hours, weekends meant heavier traffic in the restaurant, but as a rule I made little more money on weekends than I did on my regular shifts. My take home pay was usually under \$100 a week, including tips. I was promised a Christmas bonus of a two-pound box of candy, but I forfeited that by leaving the job the week before.

Even worse than the physical strain and the low pay, what upset me about the job were the working conditions. My boss was a slave driver and a dirty old man who liked to pinch pennies as well as various parts of my anatomy. On the cook's day off, he did the cooking himself but expected me to help him out in the kitchen in addition to my regular work. While I cleaned vegetables, prepared salads, and made desserts, I also had to listen to his obscene jokes and fight off his amorous advances. Rejecting him put him in an ugly mood, and then he would find special jobs for me such as cleaning the ovens and scraping down the grills. He would demand that I work harder and he would criticize me when I sat down for the brief rest breaks that were due me. During rush hours, his wife sometimes worked as cashier, and her raised eyebrows and insinuating remarks about my relationship with her husband made me furious. Finally, when she came right out and accused me of trying to seduce him, I told her what I really thought of him as well as the job. There was a terrible scene, and it wasn't clear at that point whether I quit or was fired. It was enough to know I would never work there again.

I had worked at that job for seven months, barely able to endure the work load, the poor pay, and the degrading working conditions. When the moment of my liberation came, I was too enraged to worry about how I would continue to support myself and pay for my education, but that miserable job made me even more determined to do so.

A. Summarize the following text in no more than 150 words.

The Hazards of Movie going

I am a movie fanatic. When friends want to know what picture won the Oscar in 1980 or who played the police chief in Jaws, they ask me. My friends, though, have stopped asking me if I want to go out to the movies. The problems in getting to the theater, the theater itself, and the behavior of some patrons are all reasons why I often wait for a movie to show up on TV.

First of all, just getting to the theater presents difficulties. Leaving a home equipped with a TV and a video recorder isn't an attractive idea on a humid, cold, or rainy night. Even if the weather cooperates, there is still a thirty-minute drive to the theater down a congested highway, followed by the hassle of looking for a parking space. And then there are the lines. After standing at the end of a long queue, you worry about whether there will be enough tickets, whether you will get seats together, and whether many people will sneak into the line ahead of you.

Once you have made it to the box office and gotten your tickets, you are confronted with the problems of the theater itself. If you are in one of the older theaters, you must adjust to the musty smell of seldom-cleaned carpets. Half the seats you sit in seem loose or tilted so that you sit at a strange angle. The newer twin and quad theaters offer their own problems. Sitting in an area only one-quarter the size of a regular theater, moviegoers often have to put up with the sound of the movie next door. This is especially noisy when the other movie involves racing cars or a karate war, and you are trying to enjoy a quiet love story. And whether the theater is old or new, it will have floors that seem to be coated with rubber cement. By the end of a movie, shoes almost have to be pulled off the floor because they have become sealed to a deadly compound of spilled soda, and hardening bubble gum.

Some of the customers are even more of a problem than the theater itself. Little kids race up and down the aisles, usually in giggling packs. Teenagers try to impress their friends by talking back to the screen, whistling, and making what they consider to be hilarious noises. Adults act as if they were at home in their own living rooms and comment loudly on the ages of the stars or why movies are not as good anymore. And people of all ages crinkle candy wrappers, stick gum on their seats, and drop popcorn tubs or cups of crushed ice and soda on the floor. They also cough and burp, squirm endlessly in their seats, file out for repeated trips to the rest rooms or concession stand, and elbow you out of the armrest on either side of your seat.

After arriving home from the movies one night, I decided that I was not going to be a moviegoer anymore. I was tired of the problems involved in getting to the movies and dealing with the theater itself and some of the customers. The next day I arranged to have cable TV service installed in my home. I may now see movies a bit later than other people, but I'll be more relaxed watching box office hits in the comfort of my own living room.

Like most people, for many years I remained frightened of the laser, perceiving it as a deadly device capable of enormous destruction. I recall a scene in a James Bond movie, Goldfinger, in which Bond, who was tied to a table, was nearly sliced in half by a laser beam. Since then, other films and television shows have fuelled my fear of the laser by showing mad scientists who wanted to take over the world threatening to use huge laser devices to wipe out towns and strategic defence areas. Although the laser does have tremendous potential for destruction, my unreasonable fear of the laser is fading. In recent years, scientists have found that the laser has a wide variety of applications, making of it one of the most important inventions in the last quarter of a century for improving our quality of life.

One important field in which the laser has many applications is communications. Scientists have found that the laser beam can transmit human voices; as a result, telephone companies are now using laser light signals to transmit telephone calls through extremely small cables that are capable of carrying many more transmissions than the standard telephone cables. An additional advantage is that these systems using the laser light signals will also be able to transmit video telephone conversations in the future.

Another, perhaps less-known, field in which lasers are helping improve the quality of life is metrology, which is the science of measurement. The extremely straight, narrow laser beam can be used to align parts of a structure being built; it can also position the parts of an assembly line precisely. The laser beam can also be used to measure remote distances, for example, the precise distance from the Earth to the Moon. And finally, the laser can be used to measure the drifts of the Earth's plates. This measurement, along with other data, can help in the prediction of earthquakes.

Probably the most vital application of the laser is in the field of medicine. Lasers have been devised that cut razor sharp; in fact, scientists have developed a laser knife that doctors can use for surgery. These knives are now used for some general surgery because they cut sharply and because the beam seals off the blood vessels that it severs, thus reducing blood loss considerably. The laser has also been used in eye surgery to spotweld detached retinas to the back of the eye. A less significant but perhaps more curious use of the laser in medicine is to remove tattoos. Whereas before tattoos were virtually impossible to remove without considerable difficulty and pain, now they can be removed relatively painlessly.

When Dr. Theodore H. Maiman got the first laser to work in July of 1960, what uses it would have were unknown; in fact, he called it a multimillion dollar 'solution in search of a problem'. As we have seen, the uses of the laser are numerous. It is being used in the fields of medicine, communications, and metrology, as we have seen. But I have just touched upon some of the applications of the laser; there many, many more, not to mention in the areas of defence and space travel. What should be apparent by now is that there are many problems the laser is helping to solve, and that the laser, if used wisely can be a life-saving device.