

Summarizing a Paragraph

A summary is a short retelling of a longer written passage, containing the author's most important ideas. Summarizing helps improve both your reading and writing skills. To summarize, you must read a passage closely, finding the main ideas and supporting ideas. Then you must briefly write down those ideas in a few sentences or a paragraph.

It is important to understand the difference between a summary and a paraphrase. A paraphrase is simply a rewriting of a passage in your own words. A summary, on the other hand, contains only the main idea and the supporting ideas of a passage. A summary will be much shorter than a paraphrase.

How to Summarize a Paragraph

- 1. Preview and read.** Preview and read the paragraph closely. You probably will find that you need to read the paragraph more than one time.
- 2. Make a list or outline.** Determine the main ideas and the supporting details of the paragraph. Make a list or outline of these ideas. Be sure to use your own words.
- 3. Write a summary.** Using your list, state the main ideas then write a summary of the paragraph. Limit your summary to just one or two sentences.
- 4. Read aloud and correct.** Read the summary aloud, correcting any mistakes.

EXAMPLE OF A SUMMARY**Original**

"The Northern Lights"

There are times when the night sky glows with bands of color. The bands may begin as cloud shapes and then spread into a great arc across the entire sky. They may fall in folds like a curtain drawn across the heavens. The lights usually grow brighter, then suddenly dim. During this time the sky glows with pale yellow, pink, green, violet, blue, and red. These lights are called the Aurora Borealis. Some people call them the Northern Lights. Scientists have been watching them for hundreds of years. They are not quite sure what causes them. In ancient times people were afraid of the Lights. They imagined that they saw fiery dragons in the sky. Some even concluded that the heavens were on fire.

Summary

The Aurora Borealis, or Northern Lights, are bands of color in the night sky. Ancient people thought that these lights were dragon on fire, and even modern scientists are not sure what they are.

Exercise: summarize the following paragraph

The sun was not yet up when Jane awoke. "this is the day we begin our journey." She whispered to herself. At first, Jane had not liked the idea of leaving her home forever. She had pleaded with her father to change his mind. His answer had been gentle but firm. When the ship sailed for the new land in november, the family would be on it. Now that the day was here, Jane felt a combination of excitement and fear.

ANSWER KEY

Summary

Jane is about to begin a journey by ship to a new land, and she is both excited and scared.