

What is summarizing? Summarizing reduces a text to its main idea and necessary information. Summarizing differs from paraphrasing in that summary leaves out details and terms.

Why is summarizing important? Summarizing helps you understand and learn important information by reducing information to its key ideas. Summaries can be used for annotation and study notes as well as to expand the depth of your writing.

How is summarizing different from paraphrasing?

To the untrained eye, a summary and a paraphrase may look alike. However, there are differences.

- A **summary** is shorter than the original text.
- A paraphrase can be shorter or longer than the original.
- A **summary** eliminates details, examples, and supporting points.
- A paraphrase describes the original text in different words. It does not leave out details.

NOTE: This skill sheet is a general overview of summarizing. If you are completing a summary as a class assignment, always follow the directions of your classroom instructor.

Write an Accurate Summary

Read the article and organize the information.

1. **Preview the text.** Gather the information needed to focus and set goals.
2. **Read, think about, and understand the text.** Review the material to make sure you know it well. Use a dictionary or context clues to find the meanings of any important words.
3. **Read for the thesis, main idea, and evidence.** Annotate as you usually do. If necessary, map or outline part or all of the text to find the thesis, main ideas and evidence.
4. **Identify and paraphrase the thesis or topic sentence (which contains the main idea), or compose one if the topic sentence is implied.** The main idea is the most important information or concept in a text. The statement that you write should mention the underlying meaning of the article, not just the surface details.
5. **Group the details (minor details).** Organize your evidence by grouping the article into sections. Not all information is equal: some of the information is clearly more important than the rest.

Topic Sentence:

Evidence:

#1:

#2:

#3:

6. **Within your groups of information, write a word or phrase that can replace a list of items (avoid using the word "things") or individual parts of an action.** You can do this in the margin. For example: rose, daisy, and mum becomes "flowers."
7. **Use basic signal words. ASK YOURSELF:**

Who?

(subject)

What?

(action)

Where?

(location)

When?

(time)

Why?

(reason)

How?

(procedure)

8. **Change the words but never the meaning.** A summary uses paraphrased sentences, with only occasional quotes from the original text.

Write the summary.

1. **Begin your summary with statement of the thesis.** Begin with an introductory sentence that mentions the author, title, and thesis.
2. **Write the main idea of each section in one well-developed sentence.** Make sure that what you include in your sentences are key points, not minor details.
3. **Follow the order of ideas in the original text.** After stating the thesis, you should mention the first main idea that you come across and then major details that back it up. Then you would mention the second main idea and so on.
4. **The amount of detail you include, if any, depends on your purpose for writing the summary.** For example, if you are writing a summary of a magazine article for research paper, it might be more detailed than if you were writing it to jog your memory for class discussion.
5. **Summary should be no more than ¼ the original text.** It can be one sentence, one paragraph or multiple paragraphs depending on the length of the original and your purpose for writing the summary.
6. **Do not include unnecessary or material that says the same thing as another part of the passage.**
7. **Do not use phrasing such as “This article is about” or “In this paragraph the author says ...”**
8. **Do not plagiarize or bring in your personal opinion.** Summarizing is about restating what the author says. Save your own ideas for another time.
9. **Make sure that your summary includes the meaning of the original passage and does not change the author’s purpose or tone.** Identify the main idea and double check that your summary does not change or add to it.
10. **Read and revise the content.**
 - Have you captured the main point of the article?
 - Have you included the most important details?
 - Make sure that you have included all the supporting details or mentioned all of the events, however briefly.
 - Group these details as outlined previously; do not omit key information that was in the original passage.
 - Check for an accurate topic sentence and the five Ws and an H.
11. **Read over your summary edit for grammatical and spelling errors.**
 - Is the verb tense consistent?
 - Are all names spelled correctly and capitalized?
 - Have you avoided writing run-on sentences and sentence fragments?
 - Is there sentence variety?
 - Have you avoided writing short, choppy sentences? Are there transitional words and phrases to connect ideas?

Further explanation and activities for Accurate Summarizing can be found in the following texts:

Flemming, Loraine. *Reading Keys*, 3rd ed. Boston: Wadsworth, 2011. (See pages 212-213)

McWhorter, Kathleen T. *Reading Across the Disciplines: College Reading and Beyond*, 5th ed. San Francisco: Pearson Education, 2012. (pages 213-214)

Spears, Deanne. *Improving Reading Skills: Contemporary Readings for College Students*, 6th ed. New York: McGraw- Hill, 2010. (See pages 121-123)

Langan, John. *Ten Steps to Improving College Reading Skills*, 5th ed. West Berlin, New Jersey: Townsend Press, Inc., 2008. (See pages 114-119)

Original Article with Highlighting and Annotations

Bats

By Debbie Dean

Thesis: Bats are misunderstood and unappreciated.

Main idea: Bats are not rodents with wings

#1. Wing bones like human arms/hands

#2 Wings are web of skin stretched from body to fingertips.

M.I.: Bats have good vision but are colorblind and use echolocation at night.

#1 Emit sounds that bounce off objects

#2 Locate flying insects

M.I.: The number of species is about 1000.

#1 different sizes

#2 different diets

Most eat insects

Others: flowers, sm. animals

M.I.: Vampire bats drink blood.

#1 feed on cattle blood

#2 farmers kill helpful bats when trying to kill v. bats

M.I.: Bats are helpful

#1 eat insects

#2 spread seeds

#3 pollinate plants

M.I.: Survival of bats is unknown.

#1 predators

#2 pesticides

#3 human disruptions

#4 population has dropped

M.I.: Bats look different but should be accepted and admired.

In the distant past, many people thought bats had magical powers, but times have changed. Today, many people believe that bats are rodents, that they cannot see, and that they are more likely than other animals to carry rabies. All of these beliefs are mistaken. Bats are not rodents, are not blind, and are no more likely than dogs and cats to transmit rabies. **Bats, in fact, are among the least understood and least appreciated of animals.**

Bats are not rodents with wings, contrary to popular belief. Like all rodents, bats are mammals, but they have a skeleton similar to the human skeleton. The bones in bat wings are much like those in arms and the human hand, with a thumb and four fingers. In bats, the bones of the arms and the four fingers of the hands are very long. This bone structure helps support the web of skin that stretches from the body to the ends of the fingers to form wings.

Although **bats cannot see colors, they have good vision in both dim and bright light.** Since most bats stay in darkness during the day and do their feeding at night, they do not use their vision to maneuver in the dark but use a process called **echolocation**. This process enables bats to **emit sounds from their mouths that bounce off objects** and allow them to avoid the objects when flying. They use this system to locate flying insects to feed on as well. Typically, insect-eating bats emerge at dusk and fly to streams or ponds where they feed. They catch the insects on their wingtip or tail membrane and fling them into their mouths while flying.

There are about 1,000 species of bat, ranging in size from the bumblebee bat, which is about an inch long, to the flying fox, which is sixteen inches long and has a wingspan of five feet. Each type of bat has a specialized diet. For seventy percent of bats, the diet is insects. Other types of bats feed on flowers, pollen, nectar, and fruit or on small animals such as birds, mice, lizards, and frogs.

One species of bat feeds on the blood of large mammals. This is the **common vampire bat**, which lives only in Latin America and is probably best known for feeding on the blood of cattle. Unfortunately, in an attempt to control vampire bat populations, farmers have unintentionally killed thousands of beneficial fruit-and insect-eating bats as well.

Bats, in fact, perform a number of valuable functions. Their greatest economic value is in eliminating insect pests. Insect-eating bats can catch six hundred mosquitoes in an hour and eat half their body weight in insects every night. In many tropical rain forests, fruit-eating bats are the main means of spreading the seeds of tropical fruits. Nectar-feeding bats pollinate a number of tropical plants. If it were not for bats, we might not have peaches, bananas, mangoes, guavas, figs, or dates.

Today, the survival of many bat species is uncertain. Sixty percent of bats do not survive past infancy. Some are killed by predators such as owls, hawks, snakes and other meat-eating creatures, but most are victims of pesticides and other human intrusions. In Carlsbad Caverns, New Mexico, where there were once eight million bats, there are now a quarter million. At Eagle Creek, Arizona, the bat population dropped from thirty million to thirty thousand in six years.

Bats often have been burdened with a bad reputation, perhaps because they are not the warm, cuddly sort of animal we love to love. However, **their unusual physical features should not lead us to overestimate their harm or to underestimate their value.**

Sample Summary

Introduction

- **Starts with a summary or overview of the article which includes the author's name and the title of the article.**
- **Finishes with a thesis statement that states the main idea of the article.**

Body Paragraphs

- **Each body paragraph begins with a topic sentence.**
- **Each paragraph focuses on a separate main idea and just the most important details from the article.**
- **When the main ideas of two original paragraphs are similar, they are grouped together in the same paragraph.**

For example: The paragraphs about bats' wings and eyesight are combined in one paragraph with the topic sentence, "Bats have interesting physical features."

- **Details are grouped and replaced with a phrase.**

For example: "flowers, pollen, and nectar" becomes "plant products."

- **Transitional words and phrases connect ideas.**

Concluding Paragraph

- **Summarize the main idea and the underlying meaning of the article.**

The Undervalued Bat

In the article "Bats," by Debbie Dean, we learn that in contrast to some mistaken beliefs, bats have sight, are mammals, and are not especially likely to carry rabies. Bats are relatively misunderstood and unappreciated.

Bats have some interesting physical features. They have similar bone structure and skeletons to that of humans, so they are not winged rodents. They are color blind, so they use echolocation if there is not sufficient light. Otherwise, their sight is enough.

Species of bats total about a thousand. The species come in a variety of sizes and have unique diets. Most eat insects, but some eat plant products and small animals. However, vampire bats drink blood, which can be harmful to livestock. Farmers have accidentally killed many helpful bats while trying to rid themselves of vampire bats.

Bats can actually be helpful to humans. They destroy unwanted bugs, spread fruit seeds, and pollinate plants. However, the survival of bats is not known because many are killed by human disruptions and predators. The bat population has dropped steadily and may continue to drop.

Hopefully, we will realize that although bats look different than our favorite animals, we can learn to accept and admire their uniqueness.