

## Tips on Planning a Summary

Writing a summary involves two things: thoroughly understanding the content of the source and reporting it accurately and objectively.

1. Look up unfamiliar vocabulary and make sure you understand the meaning of each word in context. Also make sure you understand any charts, graphs, or illustrations the author uses.
2. Take notes on and/or outline the source. Depending on the length of the original, it may be useful to state the main point of each paragraph in a sentence.
3. Determine the author's thesis and the main points used to support it.
4. Write your summary, reproducing the author's ideas in the order they were presented.
5. Check your summary for accuracy, balance, and coherence.

1. **Avoid mistaking details for main ideas.** Most examples, quotes, and statistics are support for main ideas. Although they may be interesting and memorable, don't confuse them with main ideas.

### Example

**Original:** "In the past, companies could hire unskilled people and train them into skilled jobs," says Henry B. Schacht, the former CEO of Cummins Engine Co. who now is chairman of AT&T's \$20 billion equipment unit. "My predecessor at Cummins moved from the shop floor and ended up as president." But because Cummins, like many companies, has cut many first-line managerial jobs, "today those stairs don't exist."

**Not the main idea:** Henry Schacht's predecessor started on the shop floor and eventually became the president.

**Main idea:** Because many companies have cut managerial positions, employees no longer have the ability to rise through the ranks.

2. **Avoid including your opinion.** Remember that a summary condenses but does not evaluate the author's ideas.

### Example

**Opinion:** Stogan seems way off base in concluding that absenteeism is due to worker burnout. A summary shouldn't make judgments about the source. It should report objectively on the content.

**Summary:** Stogan concludes that absenteeism is caused by worker burnout. This is an improved thesis for a summary essay.

