

Communicative English Language Skills II

Lecture 12

Writing: Summaries and reports

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Before we begin...

Think for one minute:

When was the last time you had to **shorten something you read** — a chapter, an article, a video — and explain it to someone else?

Talk to the person next to you (60 seconds).

90%

of university tasks ask you to read, condense, and report ideas in your own words.

By the end of this lecture, you will be able to...

- 01 Summarize** Condense a written or spoken text into your own concise version.
- 02 Report** Organize information into the standard sections of an academic report.
- 03 Write with clarity** Apply principles of plain, accurate, audience-aware language.
- 04 Self-edit** Use a checklist to revise your own and your peers' writing.

Why summaries and reports matter

Lecture notes

You distil a 90-minute talk into one page.

Lab & field reports

Science courses require clear procedural reporting.

Research papers

Literature reviews are summaries of other writers' ideas.

Workplace

Memos, briefings, project updates—short, accurate, useful.

WHAT WE WILL COVER

Today's roadmap

PART 1

Summarizing

Definition · Steps · Practice

PART 2

Reporting

Structure · Sections ·
Conventions

PART 3

Clarity

Plain words ·
Cohesion · Editing

PART 4

Apply

Activities · Peer review ·
Recap

PART 1

Summarizing

Reading deeply, writing briefly.

DEFINITION

What is a summary?

A summary is a brief, accurate restatement — in your own words — of the main ideas of a longer text or talk.

Three essentials:

1 **Brief**

Significantly shorter than the original.

2 **Accurate**

Faithful to the writer's meaning.

3 **Original**

Phrased in your own words and structure.

Why summarize?

To learn

Forces you to process and re-express ideas → deep comprehension.

To remember

A summary becomes your personal study aid.

To share

Helps classmates and instructors quickly grasp a source.

To write

Forms the backbone of essays, literature reviews, reports.

Features of a good summary

✓ A good summary

- Captures the main idea first
- In your own words and sentence patterns
- Keeps the original meaning
- Roughly one-third (or less) of the source
- Mentions the source author and title
- Free of personal opinion

✗ A weak summary

- Starts with random details
- Copies sentences with minor word swaps
- Distorts or invents ideas
- As long as the original
- No source attribution
- Adds your own arguments

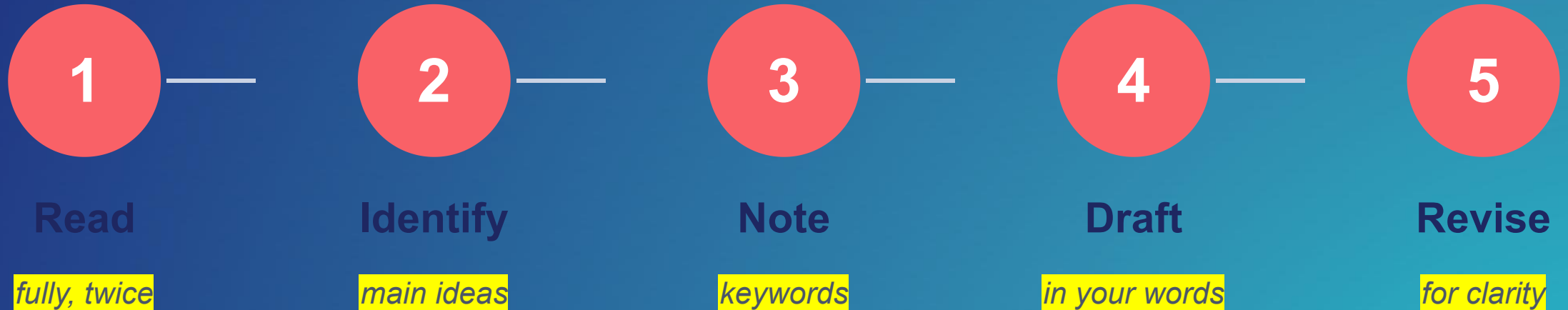
DON'T CONFUSE THEM

Summary vs. Paraphrase vs. Quotation

	Summary	Paraphrase	Quotation
Length	Much shorter	About the same	Exactly the same
Wording	Your own	Your own	Word-for-word
Use it when...	You need the gist	You need the detail in clearer words	The exact words matter

All three require attribution. Summarizing and paraphrasing are still using someone else's ideas.

Five steps to a strong summary



We will walk through each step in turn.

Step 1- Read fully, twice

1

First read for the big picture. Don't stop. Don't take notes yet.

Second read to confirm what you understood and to mark the parts that carry the meaning.

Ask yourself while reading:

- What is the writer's overall purpose?
- What is the single most important sentence in each paragraph?
- Which examples are essential — and which are just illustration?

Step 2- Identify main ideas

2

The main idea answers: 'What is this paragraph really saying?'

Look for clues:

- Topic sentences (often first or last)
- Repeated keywords
- Signal words: in summary, therefore, the key point...

Ignore:

- Examples that only illustrate
- Anecdotes and asides
- Statistics that are not the point

Step 3- Take keyword notes

3

Write keywords, not sentences. Notes should be your raw material — not a draft.

Try one of these formats:

Linear

Numbered list of one-line key points

Mind map

Central topic with branches for each idea

Cornell

Cue column · notes column · summary box

Step 4- Draft in your own words

4

Close the source. Write from your notes only.

A reliable opening formula:

In her article "X", Author (Year) argues that _____. She supports this by _____.

- Begin with the source and the main claim.
- Then condense the supporting points in order.
- End with the writer's conclusion — not yours.

Step 5- Revise for clarity & accuracy

5

Compare your draft against the original — once.

Revision checklist:

- Did I capture every main point — and only main points?
- Have I avoided copying phrases of more than three words?
- Is my summary roughly one-third of the original or less?
- Have I named the source author and date?
- Would a classmate who has not read the original understand it?

Common pitfalls

X Patchwriting

Replacing words but keeping the writer's sentences.

X Cherry-picking

Reporting only the parts that interest you.

X Adding opinion

Inserting 'I think' or 'this is wrong'.

X Distorting

Exaggerating or softening what the writer said.

X Padding

Long phrases like 'it is important to note that...'

X Skipping the source

No author, no title, no year — no credit.

Useful language for summaries

Reporting verbs

- argues
- claims
- explains
- suggests
- points out
- concludes

Linking ideas

- furthermore
- in addition
- by contrast
- as a result
- however
- therefore

Closing the summary

- overall
- in short
- to summarize
- in essence
- the writer concludes

Worked example- the original

“WHO (1994) defines life skills as skills that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. This generic type of skills includes decision-making, problem-solving, self-awareness and communication skills. TACADE (1990) views life skills as personal and social skills required by young people to function confidently and competently with themselves, with other people and with the wider community. Together, these definitions emphasize that life skills are the personal, social, and cognitive abilities that allow people to live, learn, and work successfully.”

SAME CONTENT, ~30 WORDS

Worked example- the summary

WHO (1994) and TACADE (1990) describe life skills as the personal, social, and cognitive abilities — such as decision-making and communication — that help people meet the everyday demands of life and community.

Why it works:

- Sources are named first.
- One sentence captures the shared definition.
- Examples are kept only as illustration ('such as...').
- Reduced from ~95 to ~30 words: about one-third.

Activity 1- Guided summary

Instructions

- Read the short passage your instructor gives you.
- Apply the five-step process.
- Write a 30–40 word summary in your notebook.
- Swap with a partner. Use the checklist on slide 16.
- Share one improvement you would make.



8 min

In pairs

Bring your draft to the next slide for class debrief.

WHAT DID YOU NOTICE?

Activity 1- Debrief

?

Was your first instinct to copy phrases? Why?

?

Which step felt the hardest?

?

How long did your summary turn out — too long, too short?

?

Did you remember to attribute the source?

Takeaway: the process matters more than the wording. Trust the five steps.

PART 2

Reports

Structured writing for a real reader.

DEFINITION

What is a report?

A report presents information about a specific topic, event, or investigation, in a structured format, for a specific reader.

Three defining features:

Factual

Based on evidence, not opinion.

Structured

Uses standard sections and headings.

Purposeful

Written to inform a decision or share findings.

Types of reports you will write

Lab report

Records an experiment: aim, method, results, discussion.

Research report

Investigates a question using evidence.

Field report

Documents an observation or visit.

Progress report

Shows what has been done and what remains.

Incident report

Describes an event factually for a record.

News report

Informs a general audience about a current event.

TWO DIFFERENT JOBS

Summary vs. Report

	Summary	Report
Source	Someone else's text	Your investigation or observation
Length	Short	Can be long; sectioned
Voice	Reporter of others' ideas	Author of your own findings
Goal	Show understanding	Inform a decision

Both demand the same thing: clarity.

Standard structure of a report

T

Title

A

Abstract / Summary

I

Introduction

M

Method

R

Results

D

Discussion

C

Conclusion

Ref

References

Title & Abstract

Title

- Specific, not catchy.
- States the topic and scope.
- Often: 'A study of X in Y'.

Example:

“The Effect of Soil pH on Bean Germination Rate”

Abstract

- 150–250 words.
- One sentence per section: aim, method, results, conclusion.
- Written last, even though it appears first.

Introduction

A good introduction does three things:

- 1** **Context** What is the topic? Why does it matter?
- 2** **Gap or problem** What is unknown, unsolved, or worth investigating?
- 3** **Aim** What exactly will this report do?

End with a single, sharp aim sentence: 'This report aims to ____.'

Method (or Procedure)

Tell the reader exactly what was done, in order — so it could be repeated.

Include:

- Materials / participants
- Steps in chronological order
- Time, place, equipment
- Variables measured

Language tip

Use the past tense and the passive voice.

“Fifty seeds were placed in five trays of varying soil pH.”

(rather than “We placed fifty seeds...”)

Results (Findings)

Present the data- do not interpret it yet.

Tools that help:

Tables

Exact values, easy to compare.

Figures

Show patterns, trends, distributions.

Captions

Numbered (Table 1, Figure 1) and labelled.

Prose

Highlights the key result the reader must notice.

Rule: every table or figure must be referred to in the text.

Discussion

Now you interpret. Answer four questions:

1

What do the results show?

Restate the main finding in plain language.

2

What do they mean?

Connect findings to the question in your introduction.

3

Are they consistent with what is known?

Compare to other studies or expectations.

4

What are the limitations?

Honest acknowledgement strengthens your credibility.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Conclusion

- Restate the aim.
- Summarize the key findings — briefly.
- Answer the question you opened with.
- No new information.

Recommendations

- Action-oriented sentences.
- Specific: who should do what.
- Prioritised: most important first.
- Realistic given the evidence.

References & Appendices

Every source you used is listed- every source you list was used.

References

- Use one consistent style (APA, IEEE...).
- Alphabetical order by author surname.
- Match every in-text citation.

Appendices

- Raw data, full questionnaires, large tables.
- Anything that would interrupt the main flow.
- Each appendix labelled (Appendix A, B...).

Formatting that helps the reader

1 Headings

Numbered (1, 1.1, 1.2...) so readers can navigate.

2 White space

Short paragraphs and clear margins.

3 Lists

For parallel items — never as a substitute for explanation.

4 Visuals

Tables and figures captioned and referenced.

5 Page numbers

Always.

6 Consistency

Same font, same heading style throughout.

Tone, voice and tense in reports

	Use	Example
Tone	Formal, neutral	“Results indicate that...”
Voice	Passive for method, active for argument	“Samples were collected...” / “The data suggest...”
Tense	Past for what was done; present for what is true	“The sample was tested.” / “Water boils at 100°C.”
Pronouns	Avoid “I” and “we” in formal reports	“It was observed that...”

PART 3

Clarity

Writing the reader can trust on the first reading.

DEFINITION

Clarity is the heart of writing

Clarity is when the reader understands you the first time- without effort, without re-reading, without guessing.

Five principles, ahead:

1

Plain words

2

Concise sentences

3

Logical flow

4

Active vs. passive

5

Audience awareness

Principle 1-Plain words

Prefer the short, familiar word over the long, fancy one.

	Avoid	Use
	utilize	use
	commence	begin
	in the event that	if
	at this point in time	now
	a large number of	many

Principle 2- Concise sentences

If a word is doing no work, cut it.

X “It is important to note that the results which were obtained from the experiment indicate that the temperature has an effect on the rate.” (24 words)

✓ “Temperature affects the rate.” (4 words)

Aim: 15–20 words per sentence on average.

Principle 3- Logical flow

Each sentence should connect to the one before it. Each paragraph to the one before it.

Cohesion devices

- Linkers: however, therefore, in addition...
- Pronouns: it, this, these — referring back.
- Repeated keywords across sentences.
- Old → new information order.

Paragraph rule

One paragraph = one main idea.

Open with a topic sentence. Develop with evidence.
Close with a link forward.

Principle 4- Active vs. passive voice

Use active voice by default — it is shorter, clearer, and shows who acts.

Use the passive when:

- The action matters more than the actor (lab method).
- The actor is unknown or obvious.
- You want to keep the focus on the result.

“The samples were heated for 30 minutes” vs. “We heated the samples for 30 minutes.”

Principle 5- Know your audience

Before you write, ask three questions:

Who

Who will read this — an expert, a peer, a general reader?

Why

What do they need to know or decide after reading?

How

How much technical language can they handle without explanation?

Different reader = different writing.

Self-editing checklist

Content & structure

- ✓ Does each paragraph have one main idea?
- ✓ Have I used plain words wherever possible?
- ✓ Are my sentences under 25 words?
- ✓ Have I cut every padding phrase?

Polish & accuracy

- ✓ Are tenses consistent?
- ✓ Are sources cited and listed?
- ✓ Have I read it aloud?
- ✓ Would my reader understand on first read?

PART 4

Apply

Two more activities, then we close.

Activity 2- Mini news report

In groups of three:

- Choose an event — real or imagined (e.g. a campus issue).
- Draft a 120–150 word news report.
- Use this structure: **Headline · Lead · Details · Quote · Closing.**
- Apply the clarity principles from Part 3.
- Choose one person to present to the class.



12 min

Groups of 3

8 min writing + 4 min sharing.

Activity 3- Peer review

Swap your news report with another group and give:

- One specific thing the writers did well.
- One sentence you would shorten — and how.
- One unclear point that needs more information.
- Sign your feedback. Ownership matters.

Two-stars-and-a-wish

A simple, kind, honest feedback frame you can use for the rest of the semester.

Quick recap

Summarize

Read deeply. Identify main ideas. Write briefly in your own words. Cite the source.

Report

Use the standard structure:
Title · Abstract · Introduction ·
Method · Results ·
Discussion · Conclusion ·
References.

Clarity

Plain words. Short sentences.
Logical flow. Active voice by
default. Write for your reader.

All three rest on the same foundation: respect for the reader.

Reflection & homework

Reflect tonight

- Which step of the summary process is hardest for me?
- Which clarity principle would change my writing the most?
- What kind of report will I write first this semester?

Homework

- Choose one paragraph from your textbook.
- Write a 40-word summary using the five steps.
- Identify two passive sentences and rewrite them as active.
- Bring both to next class for peer review.

Thank You

Questions, ideas, and reflections are warmly welcomed.

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