

Summary of summary techniques

- 1 Use your own words as far as possible, but try to ensure that you retain the *exact meaning* of the original.
- 2 Keep, as far as possible, to the arrangement of ideas of the original passage.
- 3 Include only the points made in the passage; do not introduce any ideas of your own.
- 4 Leave out negative statements, or make them positive.
- 5 Do not write questions, but turn them into statements if they are relevant.
- 6 Do not include spoken words or quotations, but report the idea contained in them if it is relevant.
- 7 Do not include repetitions of ideas or phrases, and be as concise as possible in your wording.
- 8 Leave out examples, comparisons and details if they merely illustrate a point which is being made and do not contribute anything new to the main argument of the passage.
- 9 Try to find generalisations for the ideas contained in lists of words and phrases.
- 10 Use linking words and constructions, such as ‘nevertheless’, ‘consequently’, ‘despite’, ‘because’, ‘although’, ‘however’, ‘therefore’, ‘thus’, ‘since’, and participles (‘-ing’ verbs), to provide balance and continuity.

Additional points

There are a few more details which are worth mentioning:

- 1 You are quite likely to be asked to count the number of words you have used, and to record the total. Don't forget to do this, and try to be accurate. If your passage looks as if it might be longer than you have indicated, the examiner will certainly count the words him or herself. You can probably afford to be up to ten words over the allowed maximum without losing more than a couple of marks, but if you are only two or three words over, it should be easy enough to save a mark by simple techniques like combining sentences with the use of a participle. If you are many words under the limit, on the other hand, the chances are that you have missed some relevant points, and you should expand your summary.
- 2 If you are asked to supply a title for the passage, try to keep it short (no more than ten words at most) and think of a phrase which represents an encapsulation of the theme of the passage as a whole. You are not expected to include the title in your final word count.
- 3 There is no point in wasting words by using reported speech, with phrases like ‘the writer said/says that...’ Simply summarise what is said without any kind of introduction.
- 4 It is generally considered appropriate for the summary to be written as a single paragraph, but if you split it into separate paragraphs at suitable points, it is extremely unlikely to be held against you. It is probably best not to follow the paragraphing of the original passage in your summary, since this is likely to result in some extremely short paragraphs.
- 5 It is best not to use abbreviations of any sort, except in a note-making exercise, since a summary is a piece of formal prose, and abbreviations are a rather unfair short-cut to word saving.
- 6 When your summary is complete, you should check carefully for spelling and punctuation errors, since marks will be allocated for technical accuracy.