



A2

SEMINAR 2 Social Sciences

- 1 “Sociology is the science with the greatest number of methods and the least results.”
– **Henri Poincaré** (1854-1912), French mathematician.
- 2 “The first rule of sociology: things are not always what they seem.” – **Peter Berger** (b.1929),
American sociology and theology professor.
- 3 “If you torture* data enough, they will finally confess*!” – **Clifford Geertz** (1926-2006), American
anthropologist.

Discussion Questions

- 1 What are social sciences?
- 2 Is the study of society a science?
- 3 What are some differences between social and natural sciences?
- 4 Are natural sciences more ‘scientific’ than social sciences?
- 5 Are there any ‘general laws’ in social sciences?
- 6 Could you name any methods used in social sciences?
- 7 Why are interdisciplinary* and multi-theoretical* approaches widely used in social sciences?

Academic Writing – Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is writing the ideas of another person in your own words. It is useful when you are using the work of others to support your own view. When paraphrasing, you need to change the words and the structure but keep the meaning the same. Remember that even when you paraphrase, not only quote, someone's work, you must acknowledge it.

Look at this example:

Source:

It has long been known that Cairo is the most populous city on earth, but no-one knew exactly how populous it was until last month.

Paraphrase:

Although Cairo has been the world's most heavily populated city for many years, the precise population was not known until four weeks ago.

The following stages may be useful:

1. **Read and understand the text.**
2. **Make a list of the main ideas.**



- a. Find the important ideas/words/phrases. In some way mark them – write them down, underline or highlight them.
 - b. Find alternative words/synonyms for these words/phrases - do not change specialised vocabulary or common words.
- 3. Change the structure of the text.**
- a. Identify the meaning relationships between the words/ideas - e.g. cause/effect, generalisation, contrast.
 - b. Express these relationships in a different way.
 - c. Change the grammar of the text: nouns to verbs, adjectives to adverbs, etc., break up long sentences, combine short sentences.
- 4. Rewrite the main ideas in complete sentences.** Combine your notes into a piece of continuous writing.
- 5. Check your work.**
- a. Make sure the meaning and length are the same.
 - b. Make sure the style is your own.
 - c. Remember to acknowledge other people's work.

Notice the differences in these examples:

- a. Memory is the capacity for storing and retrieving information.
Memory is the facility for keeping and recovering data.
- b. Research and publications are accumulating in each of the four fields of anthropology at an exponential rate.
Studies and books are gathering in all of the four areas of anthropology at a very fast speed.
- c. Besides being a theory about the basis and origin of knowledge and the contents of our minds in general, empiricism is also sometimes a methodology.
Not only is empiricism a theory about the basis and origin of knowledge and the contents of our minds in general, it is sometimes also a methodology.

Look at how you may change the grammar of a text:

Change nouns to verbs

This rewriting of history was not so much a matter of a new start.
This rewriting of history was not so much a matter of starting again.

Change verbs to nouns

The Normans invaded in 1066.
The Norman invasion took place in 1066.

Change adverbs to adjectives

Politically, it was a bad decision.
From a political point of view, it was a bad decision.

Change active verbs to passive

We can relate a study of this kind to texts in other media too
A study of this kind can be related to texts in other media too.



Break up sentences

Given the extent to which deforestation increased markedly in the four southern states during 1987 and 1988, it is heartening news that during the early part of the 1989 dry season the burning seemed to have been curtailed somewhat, due to a combination of policy changes, better controls on burning, and most important of all an exceptionally wet "dry" season.

Deforestation increased markedly in the four southern states during 1987 and 1988. On account of this, it is heartening news that during the early part of the 1989 dry season the burning seemed to have been curtailed somewhat. The reason for this is a combination of policy changes, better controls on burning, and most important of all an exceptionally wet "dry" season.

Combine sentences

Tropical forests are defined here as evergreen or partly evergreen forests. They grow in areas receiving not less than 100 mm of precipitation in any month for two out of three years. The mean annual temperature is 24-plus degrees Celsius. The area is essentially frost-free.

Tropical forests are defined here as evergreen or partly evergreen forests, in areas receiving not less than 100 mm of precipitation in any month for two out of three years, with mean annual temperature of 24-plus degrees Celsius, and essentially frost-free.

Task 1 – Paraphrasing – Rewrite the following texts in your own words.

A) Since differences in the anatomy and physiology of human males and females are so obvious it is easy to be misled into believing that sex-linked roles and statuses are primarily biological rather than cultural phenomena.

B) Man has added extraneous substances to his food since prehistoric times. Salt and spices are the oldest food additives we know of, used by prehistoric man to preserve his meat and fish, and to make the taste more interesting. Today, the substances, natural and synthetic, added to food run into thousands. Most of the foods we buy contain one or more additives.

C) A culture is the totally socially acquired life-way or life-style of a group of people. It consists of the patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling and acting that are characteristic of the members of a particular society or segment of society.

Adapted from EUFAP Academic Writing viewed at <http://www.uefap.com/writing/report/repfram.htm> on 8.8.2010.



Academic Writing – Summary Writing

The abstract or summary of a statement, thesis*, paper, or other document is a shorter version of the originals providing its gist* (main idea). The aim of a summary is to give readers a clear, objective, accurate and balanced account* of a written or spoken text. After reading the abstract, a reader may decide to read the whole document (or in the case of a public presentation, attend the meeting at which the document will be read out and/or discussed). The abstract or summary should be understandable even when read separately from the original.

Task 2 – Read the following characteristics and decide which ones a summary should have in order to be effective.

- a) The same order of facts and ideas as the original.
- b) Similar wording to the original as well as occasional phrases taken directly from the original.
- c) Different sentence patterns* from the original.
- d) Additional information which the original writer omitted*, but which helps to understand the subject.
- e) A personal comment on the subject.
- f) Simpler vocabulary than the original.
- g) Key points of the original.
- h) References to figures, tables, or sources.
- j) Use of the first person singular.
- k) Written in point form.
- l) The title should be included in the text.
- m) The opening sentence should state the main idea.

Task 3 – Read the following pairs of summaries and decide which one is more appropriate and WHY, given the above guidelines and that the limit is 50-70 words (the word count is at the end):

1) Sleep and dreams

Basic information about sleep – phases of sleep, mainly REM sleep.

How long to sleep to feel well when awakening? Why we sleep? The reason in some theories.

Dreams as products of process of transferring memories. Interesting facts about dreams. The significance of sleep and dreams. 48

There are three phases of sleep, some of which involve dreams and of which REM (Rapid Eye Movement) is the most important. Sleep is important to repair the body and allow us to feel refreshed in the morning both psychologically and physically. Dreams are a fascinating and essential part of this process. 51

2) Czech cinema has gone through great changes since 1989. Some have considered the state of the financial and artistic conditions for filmmakers to be disadvantageous because there was no more guaranteed financial support and only market forces could be relied on. This meant that artistic aims in some cases have had to be sacrificed for commercial reasons. 57

My topic was “Czech Cinema Since 1989: Crisis or Not”.

I focused on the financial crisis first, on art crisis then.

It's connected. I showed it in some examples. My result was that Czech cinema isn't in crisis, but it's necessary to be careful about it. 46



3) Tibetan “singing” bowls are a fascinating ancient musical instrument used in rituals and for meditation. The physical qualities of the instrument are important in that it is essential that the materials be pure. The use of this instrument is widespread in Asia and is a rapidly growing phenomenon in the West. 51

The presentation was about Tibetan “singing” bowls. The main goal was to bring and describe this ancient musical instrument to the public. The presentation prompted some questions, which were answered afterwards. In the end, the physical presentation of the instrument took place. It seemed that everyone was amused and gained some new information. 53

4) The presentation was called “The Leading Figure of the Velvet Revolution”. Vaclav Havel was mentioned as a student, dissident, and politician. He completed his studies at the Academy of Performing Arts. In 1977 he became one of the speakers of Charter 77. After challenging the Communist regime, he became leader of a civil movement called “Civic Forum” and later was voted as the president of Czechoslovakia. After breaking up the Czechoslovak Federation, he became the first president of the Czech Republic. Now he is retired but still active in the struggle for human rights. 94

Former Czech president Vaclav Havel was a leading figure of the Velvet Revolution. In 1977 he was imprisoned as a dissident for his activities in Charter 77, a challenge to the Communist regime. In 1989 this quality of speaking out for civil rights lead him to become the leader of Civic Forum. Although now retired from politics, he is still active in human rights activities. 65

5) The Shroud of Turin is the most intensively studied single object in the history. Its first recorded appearance was in France at the beginning of the 14th century; now it is housed in Turin. It's a piece of linen that is 2.3 x 1 meters in size. There is an imprint of an image of a man, front and back. The image resembles Christ. Scientific findings show that the man died of crucifixion, suffered from Roman flagellation, and carried a cross. How this image is formed is a mystery. No traces of pigment or brushstroke could be found. Carbon dating tests have indicated that it is from the medieval period. Recently the discussion has be re-opened with new findings which contradict the former carbon-dating results. There is no scientific technique which can reproduce anything similar to the Shroud of Turin. 141

The Shroud of Turin, a cloth with a supposed imprint of Christ, is the most studied object in history. Housed in Turin today, it may have first appeared in France in the early 14th century. Although carbon-dating tests have indicated that it is from medieval times, recent findings contradict the former tests and have re-opened the discussion about the cloth's authenticity. 61

6) The war between Argentina and the United Kingdom over the British Falkland Islands, which are located off the coast of Argentina, was an important battle for both countries. Although the war enflamed Argentine patriotism, lasted for 72 days, was located far from home, and cost the UK 2 billion pounds, the UK was still considered the winner for protecting its distant possession. 62

The war took place on the British Islands, also very important for Argentine nationality. The war lasted for 72 days and even though the Falklands are in the opposite hemisphere and it cost the United Kingdom 2 billion pounds, Great Britain was considered the winner. 45



Task 4 – Using your knowledge regarding the characteristics of an effective summary (from Task 1), read the short text below and decide which of the following summaries are effective.

All social sciences are ‘multi-theoretical’, that is, they are characterized by major theoretical disputes* and controversies*. It is difficult to identify clearly, using identical labels for all disciplines, the various positions that are held. Scientists are repeatedly faced with the challenge* that there is no obvious* and straightforward* answer to social problems, and they often disagree just as, for example, economists disagree over the causes of a country’s economic crisis, and policemen and social workers disagree over the causes of problems such as vandalism. Although there is no certain or ‘one true’ explanation of social problems, the fact that there are disagreements between social scientists is a virtue* rather than a drawback* because it shows the relevance* of the social sciences to the controversies and dilemmas facing society.

Adapted from: Potter, David et al., ed.: Society and the Social Sciences, Open University Press, London, 1987, pp. 4-7.

Summary 1

Social sciences (e.g. economics, geography, political science, psychology and sociology) have been described as multi-theoretical studies; in other words, social scientists hold various theoretical positions. This is considered a virtue rather than a defect.

Summary 2

The multi-theoretical character of social sciences is discussed. Theoretical controversies and the non-existence of one certain answer to social problems are seen as an advantage rather than a disadvantage as they reflect controversies within a society.

Summary 3

All social sciences are ‘multi-theoretical’, that is, they are characterized by major theoretical disputes and controversies, various positions are held, there is no obvious and straightforward answer to social problems, and disagreement is frequent, for example, over the causes of a country’s economic crisis, over the causes of problems such as vandalism. But, the fact that there is no certain or ‘one true’ explanation of social problems or disagreements between social scientists are virtues rather than drawbacks because they show the relevance of the social sciences to the controversies and dilemmas facing society.

Summary 4

In my opinion, the paragraph dealing with the idea that all social sciences are ‘multi-theoretical’ is right because I think that all the supporting arguments, such as theoretical controversies or no single obvious and straightforward answer to social problems, are very true. However, I tend to disagree with the opinion presenting such a situation as an advantage of social sciences.

Summary 5

This paragraph describes the nature of social sciences. General characteristics are shown and partly evaluated. A comment on the relation between social sciences and society is mentioned.

Advice:

In a short summary, it’s a good idea to follow these steps:

- a) read the passage carefully several times highlighting key words,
- b) decide on the essential points and take notes,
- c) expand the notes and key words into a sentence or two.



Example:

Some scientists and students as well as some other people from the non-academic environment do not like the idea that the word 'science' is applied for both natural and social sciences. They express their disapproval* of the use of the term 'science' in the context of the social sciences, such as sociology, economics or political science, claiming* that the fundamental principles on which science is based, which are exactness, precision, unquestionable certainty and the clear ability to formulate general laws that are applicable to the natural sciences such as chemistry and physics, do not reach the same level in the social studies and therefore should not be called sciences.

Key words:

- some people
- disagree
- 'science'
- social sciences vs. natural sciences
- lack of exactness, certainty and ability to formulate general laws

Sample summary of the above example:

Some people object to the use of the word 'science' in the social sciences on the grounds that such studies do not have the same degree of exactness, certainty and ability to formulate general laws as are found in the physical sciences such as chemistry and physics.

Task 5 – Read the following extracts concerning differing sociological views (and arguments) about post-modernism and underline the key sentences and words. Formulate a summary in one or two sentences.

Sociological Views on Post-Modernism

Not all sociologists agree with the idea that we, as a society, are living in a post-modern phase of social and intellectual development. Further, many sociologists argue that 'post-modernism' is actually a non-concept; that is, it describes a situation that owes more to the philosophical musings* of 'post-modernist' writers than to a valid* description of reality. In this respect, such writers sometimes use the concept of 'late-modern' or 'late Capitalist' society rather than 'post-modern' society. It is, as they say, a small but important difference of interpretation.

Jonathan Gershuny:

"I am not very keen on postmodernist social theory. My view is that it reflects little more than a hiatus* in the development of mainstream* social theory... Postmodernists conclude that we have reached the end of the grand theory and that now we must retreat* to something altogether less ambitious in our attempts to understand society. My conclusion, by contrast, is that we must search for new theories."

Ken Thompson:

"The concept of postmodernism has served a useful function for sociological theory in a number of ways... The underlying assumption* in sociological theories of modernity and modernisation was that all societies were evolving in the same direction, characterised by increasing rationalisation and secularisation. [Postmodernism] has been extremely useful in various fields of sociological interest for focusing attention on tendencies that are the reverse of those predicted... To take one example, the sociology of religion has had to take [notice of religious revivals in various forms of 'fundamentalism', especially those linked with ethnicity, nationalism and cultural identity."

Michael Rustin:

"The developments usually thought of as 'postmodernism' have had some productive consequences for sociological theory. For example, they have highlighted the importance of consumption as a major



aspect of life; they have focused on the role of information; they have called into question some of the undue certainties and authoritarianism of modernist ways of thinking. .. However, I think there is a systematic tendency for writers influenced by these ideas to 'turn a blind eye'* to persisting structural forces in our society and to suggest there is more... freedom of choice than there is in fact."

Pip Jones:

"Postmodernism has two distinct aspects: the first refers to art, aesthetics and media production; the second to knowledge and its production. Modernism refers to the belief in the possibility of humans acquiring the Truth and, in the light of this true understanding, reconstructing their world, thereby achieving progress. Postmodernism refers to the belief that such a view is wrong... arguing that no human being is capable of knowing the truth, only a Truth. This links postmodernism to relativism – the view that humans can only know reality from a particular, culture-bound, historically-specific point of view. Here the argument is that even the criteria by which we judge truth or falsehood are themselves relative to time and place".

Adapted from *Sociology Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, November 1998, viewed at <http://www.sociology.org.uk/p1quotes.htm> on 7.5.2003.

Writing Guidelines for a Longer Summary (Paragraph)

1. Read the piece to be summarized and **take notes**. Make sure you understand the content, as well as the main message being conveyed. Look closely at the **topic sentences** and **key words** repeated throughout the text.
2. Read through your notes and cross out less useful information while **underlining** what you believe to be the most important points.
3. Using your notes, write your summary in **complete sentences** in your own words. Make sure your interpretation is true to the original. Your opinions should not appear in the summary and you should NOT write in the first person. Write about the topic and not about you as the writer.
4. Ensure that your finished summary has interesting and accurate **opening** and **closing sentences**. You can use compound and complex sentences to develop your ideas, rather than overly simple and short sentences.

Task 6 – Grammar – Countable and Uncountable Nouns

- 1 Today's news (**is / are**) very interesting.
- 2 How much (**damage / damages**) (**was / were**) there after the attack?
- 3 (**That is / Those are**) all his (**knowledge / knowledges**) of economy.
- 4 I need some (**information / informations**) about practical lessons.
- 5 They have been given a lot of important (**advice / advices**) at the faculty meeting.
- 6 You did not support your arguments with enough (**evidence / evidences**).
- 7 How much money (**is / are**) needed for the project?
- 8 Language students need at least some knowledge of (**linguistic / linguistics**).
- 9 (**Ethic / Ethics**) (**is/are**) the most difficult part of this course.
- 10 This week is better as we have (**less / fewer**) (**homework / homeworks**).
11. I feel we are making (**progress/progresses**).
12. This conference was attended by (**fewer/less**) delegates than the other one.
13. When the fire started, there was (**total chaos/a total chaos**).



Vocabulary

1. to confess	přiznat se
2. to torture	mučit
3. *to grasp (to understand)	pochopit
4. *interdisciplinary	mezioborový
5. *multi-theoretical	zahrnující mnoho teorií
6. *thesis (dissertation)	teze (disertace)
7. *gist (main idea)	hlavní myšlenka
8. *account	zpráva
9. *pattern (structure, form)	struktura, tvar
10. *to omit (to leave out)	vynechat
11. *dispute	spor
12. *controversy	sporný bod
13. *challenge	výzva
14. *obvious	zřejmý
15. *straightforward	jednoznačný, přímý
16. *virtue	klad, přednost
17. *drawback	nedostatek
18. *relevance	důležitost, významnost
19. *disapproval	nesouhlas
20. *to claim	tvrdit
21. musings	přemítání, hloubání
22. *valid	platný
23. *hiatus	mezera
24. *mainstream	hlavní proud
25. *to retreat	ustoupit
26. *assumption	předpoklad, domněnka
27. 'to turn a blind eye'	„přimhouřit oko“

Word bank

1. social problems	sociální problémy
2. to deal with problems	zabývat se problémy
3. to face/to be faced with problems	čelit problémům
4. to sort out/solve problems	řešit problémy
5. social conflicts	sociální konflikty
6. controversial issues	kontroverzní otázky
7. contemporary society	současná společnost
8. consumer society	konzumní společnost
9. class society	třídní společnost
10. classless society	beztřídní společnost
11. just society	spravedlivá společnost
12. social justice	sociální spravedlnost
13. economic problems	ekonomické problémy
14. far-reaching consequences	dalekosáhlé důsledky/následky