

Writing a summary

By the end of this unit you will be able to

- organise a summary
- evaluate a summary
- write a summary of an academic article

Lesson 1 What makes a good summary?

Lead-in

1 Work in pairs and discuss the questions.

- Have you ever written a summary?
- Why do we write them?
- How long should a summary be?

Organising a summary

2 In Column 1, tick the features you think a summary should have.

	1	2
1 The author's name and the title of the article		
2 Graphs and tables		
3 Detailed explanations		
4 The author's main idea		
5 Details to support the idea		
6 Your own views on the problem		
7 As much of the original text as possible		
8 Quotations		
9 Formal expressions, linking words		

3 Read the example summary below and say what kind of misunderstanding takes place in a college classroom.

In his article 'No Allusions in the Classroom,' Jaime O'Neill emphasises the existing misunderstanding between students and teachers in a college classroom. He claims that teachers assume their students have basic knowledge they do not really possess. Moreover, students do not ask questions because they do not want to show their ignorance. O'Neill supports his conclusions by the results of the general knowledge test he administered to his students, which they answered more incorrectly than correctly. The author adds that, according to recent polls, a large portion of adults in the US are ignorant about the history of the country and the planet they live on. Finally, O'Neill expresses his opinion that instructors should be responsible for giving general information to their students.

4 In Column 2 in Activity 2, tick the features which are included in this summary.

Language focus

5 The words in the list are often used to report what other people say or think. Add at least three more verbs from the summary above.

state	inform	argue	mention	point out
suggest	demonstrate	discuss	believe	

6 Say which sentences in the summary in Activity 3 are used to:

- 1 introduce the main ideas of the original
- 2 provide an author's point of view
- 3 finish the summary

7 In expressions a–h underline the reporting verbs. Circle the words and phrases that show the order of events.

- a At the beginning of the article the author points out/emphasises ...
- b Next / Further on, the following problems/issues are raised ...
- c In addition, the reader is informed about ...
- d Then, the following points are examined/studied: ...
- e The author suggests/assumes/claims that ...
- f Summing up the author's thoughts ...
- g Finally, the author concludes/assumes that ...
- h The research the author conducted demonstrated that ...

8 Match phrases a–h in Activity 7 to functions 1–3 in Activity 6. Sometimes there may be more than one possible answer.

9 Read the summary below. Is the original article positive or negative about the educational reforms?

John Tierney, in 'The Coming Revolution in Public Education', ¹e _____ the belief that the educational reforms in the USA are harmful. The author ²i _____ us that, as a result of the reform initiatives, standardised tests and assessments have been introduced in public schools and teachers held accountable for the results. The reforms, he ³a _____, also recommend controlling classroom instruction. He then points out that the reforms have profit motives and involve corporate interests. Further on the reader is informed about the negative reaction of the public and teachers to these reforms. The author ⁴s _____ that teachers should be given more autonomy and respected as professionals. Tierney then ⁵a _____ that standardisation leads to the loss of individuality and diversity. Finally, the author ⁶a _____ that public education is not aimed at bringing in money, and that is why business should not be involved. As a conclusion, Tierney ⁷s _____ that these kinds of reforms should be opposed.

10 Complete the summary with reporting verbs from Activities 3, 5 and 7. The first letter of each verb is given.

11 Read the notes about the main ideas of an article. Write a summary using reporting verbs and linking words.

- *author: James Vernon*
- *title: 'Open online courses – an avalanche that might just get stopped'*
- *online education through massive open online courses (MOOCs) is not always as good as it may seem*
- *if offered free, MOOCs bring in no money and can even fail to cover their costs*
- *the quality of education cannot be effectively monitored and controlled*
- *if businesses sell the MOOCs, low-achieving students have access to higher education*
- *academics are not enthusiastic about online higher education*

Lesson 2 Topic sentences

Lead-in

1 What is a topic sentence? Where do you find it in a paragraph?

Writing a summary

2 Read the article by Tonya Troka and say why more people nowadays prefer to study online.

The future of online education

Distance education has been around from the 1800s. Correspondence courses helped people learn trades in their own free time, while radio and taped television courses later educated students in remote areas. Now, with the rapid expansion and evolution of the internet, online education has become commonplace. It's now possible to earn a degree from an accredited college without ever setting foot on campus, and more people enroll every year. According to the Sloan Consortium's report 'Changing Course: Ten Years of Tracking Online Education in the United States,' more than 6.7 million students were taking at least one online course during the fall 2011 term, an increase of 570,000 students over the previous year.

Higher education, in general, has grown significantly. In 1975, 21.9 % of Americans had a Bachelor's degree. In 2011, 38.7 % of Americans between the ages of 25 and 64 had earned a two- or four-year college degree. The main driver behind the increase in higher education is the huge change in the overall economy of the U.S. over the last fifty years. Most workers are now employed by the service sector, where more specialized skills are often a necessary requirement for finding a job. As a result, some post-secondary education is now seen as critical for workplace viability by a majority of the population.

And the majority of the population is now online. In 1997, less than 20% of U.S. households had internet access. By 2011, that percentage had grown to 71.7 %. As with music, television, and newspapers, higher education needs to move to where the people are if it wants to expand its user base. Also, traditional campuses are having trouble maintaining facilities that meet the growing college population's needs. While the cost savings of running an online degree program aren't tremendous, it's generally easier for colleges to move programs online than it is for them to build extensions to their campuses.

The Sloan Consortium's findings reveal that many institutions expect more working adults to turn to continuing education online to build new skills or enhance existing ones to better their chances in the job marketplace, and also to avoid paying higher fuel costs as commuter students. Every year has seen an increase in the proportion of total enrollments that are online, starting at 11.7% in 2003 and increasing to 32% in 2011. The convenience of being able to complete a degree at a reduced impact to personal and professional life makes online education attractive to working adults. As adults strive to continue earning, they'll want to continue learning. And they'll continue gravitating to ways that fit their lifestyle.

- 3 Underline the topic sentence in each paragraph. Compare your ideas in pairs.
- 4 Look through the text again and underline ideas, supporting details and facts you could include in a summary of this text.
- 5 Work in pairs. Read the two summaries below. Which summary reflects the text better?

1

In her 'The Future of Online Education' Tonya Troka provides the reasons for the growing popularity of learning via the internet. The author mentions the results of surveys that demonstrate that the number of people taking part in on-line courses is growing. She stresses that nowadays there is an increased demand for educated specialists, and on-line education gives an opportunity to receive a diploma without leaving work. Moreover, the author suggests that this type of education is convenient for Universities, as its cost is rather low. Finally, the author states that on-line education is a good alternative for working adults.

2

The text under consideration is written by Tonya Troka. The purpose of the article is to give readers information about the growing amount of online education. Based on convincing data the author proves the idea that online courses are a convenient and attractive way to get a degree or to continue education without giving up employment. The author also stresses the fact that traditional campuses are having trouble maintaining facilities that meet the growing college population's needs. Troka finishes her article by stating that as adults strive to continue earning, they'll want to continue learning.

- 6 Compare Summaries 1 and 2. Tick the correct boxes in the first and second columns.

	Summary 1	Summary 2	Summary 3
1 The summary is short.			
2 The summary reflects the main idea of the author.			
3 The title of the article and the author's name are included.			
4 Some examples to support the main idea are included.			
5 It is written in language different from the author's.	-		
6 There are no detailed explanations.			
7 Quotations are not included.			
8 The summary is written in a formal style.			

- 7 Suggest improvements for the less successful summary.
- 8 Write a summary for an article from the Reading Module, Unit 2.
- 9 Work in pairs. Read your partner's summary critically. Tick the column for Summary 3 in the checklist in Activity 6. Give feedback to your partner.