

Summary writing: the six-step checklist, a planner, and the eight mistakes that lose marks

The six steps

Step	Do	Done
1. Read it twice	Once for the sense; once with a pencil, marking each paragraph's main idea (usually the first or last sentence)	[]
2. One line per paragraph	The main idea in your own words; if it will not fit one line you have not found it	[]
3. Cut	Examples, anecdotes, quotations, lists, figures of speech, repetition, numbers that are not the point	[]
4. Write from your notes, text covered	Connected sentences, the author's order, third person ('the author argues')	[]
5. Check against the original	Changed meaning? Added anything? Missed a paragraph?	[]
6. Check the length	A quarter to a third of the original, or the limit set; over: cut the weakest sentence; under: a main idea is missing	[]

Planner: one line per paragraph

Title of the text: _____ Word limit: _____

Para 1: _____

Para 2: _____

Para 3: _____

Para 4: _____

Para 5: _____

Para 6: _____

Para 7: _____

Para 8: _____

Main idea of the whole text, in one sentence:

The eight mistakes that lose marks: check your draft

- [] Copied a sentence or phrase from the text
- [] Included an example instead of the point it illustrates
- [] Added an opinion ('I think the author is right')
- [] Over or under length
- [] Missed a paragraph's main idea
- [] Changed the author's order
- [] Changed a meaning ('some argue' became 'research proves')
- [] Kept a figure of speech or image

The rules for exam summaries

Exam	What is asked	What costs marks
IGCSE First Language English (0500)	A summary of one aspect of a passage, about 120 words	Copied phrases; the wrong aspect; the word limit; comment
GCSE English Language	Synthesis and summary across two texts	No clear points; retelling
CBSE Class 9 to 12	Note-making in a format, then a summary of about 80 words	Missing headings; abbreviations not keyed; over length
SAT Reading and Writing	Which sentence best summarises a passage	Choosing a detail over the main idea
School tasks, grades 5 to 8	A paragraph summary of a chapter or article	Not own words; details; wrong order

The two-week plan

Days	Do
1 to 3	One paragraph a day: its main idea in one line; check with someone
4 to 7	A short article a day: one line per paragraph, then a four-sentence summary from the lines, text covered
8 to 11	The same with a word limit: count, cut
12 to 14	An exam-style task from the student's own board, under time, marked to the board's criteria

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