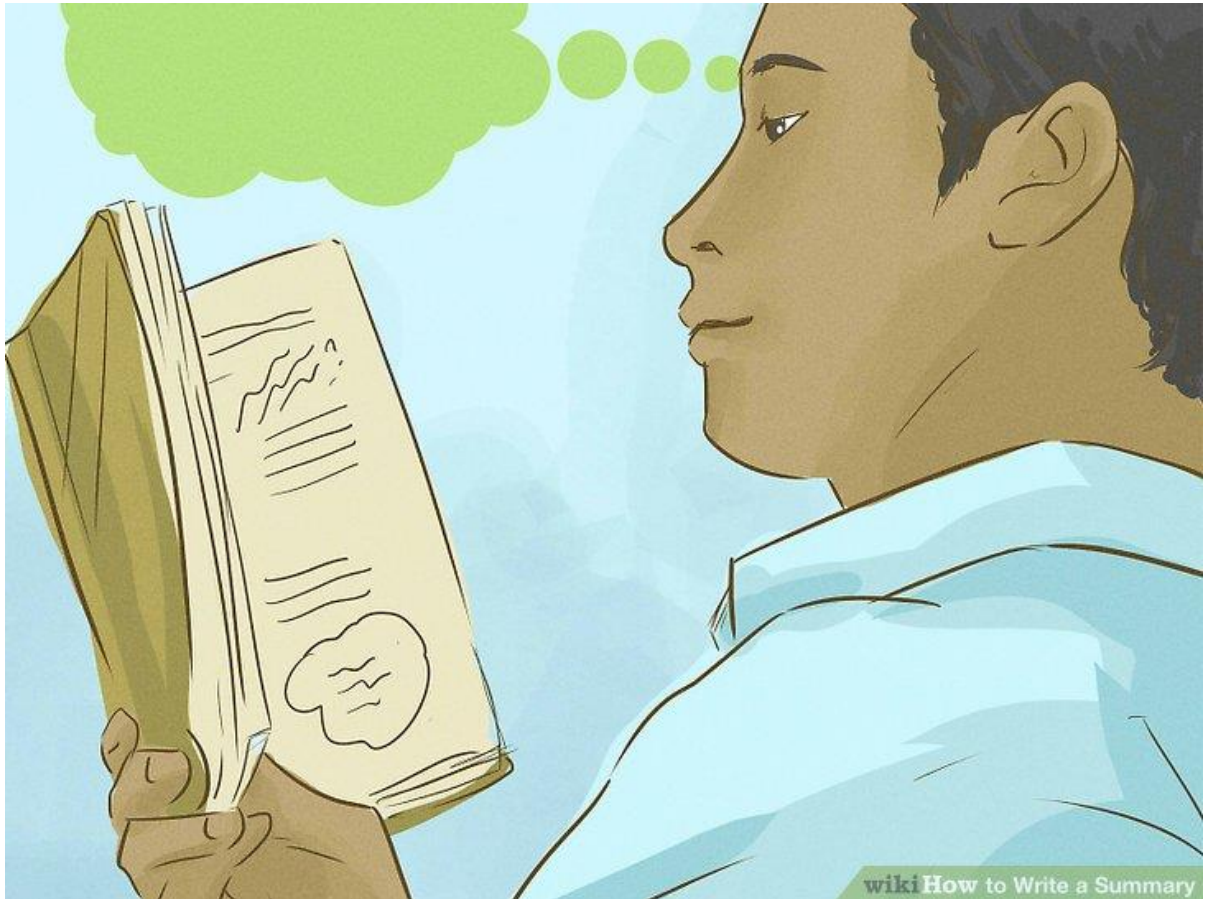


How to Write a Summary

Writing a summary is a great way to process the information you read, whether it's an article or a book. If you're assigned a summary in school, the best way to approach it is by reviewing the piece you're summarizing. Read it thoroughly and take notes on the major points you want to include in your summary. When you get to writing your summary, rely on your memory first to make sure the summary is in your own words. Then, revise it to ensure that your writing is clear and the grammar, punctuation, and spelling are all perfect.

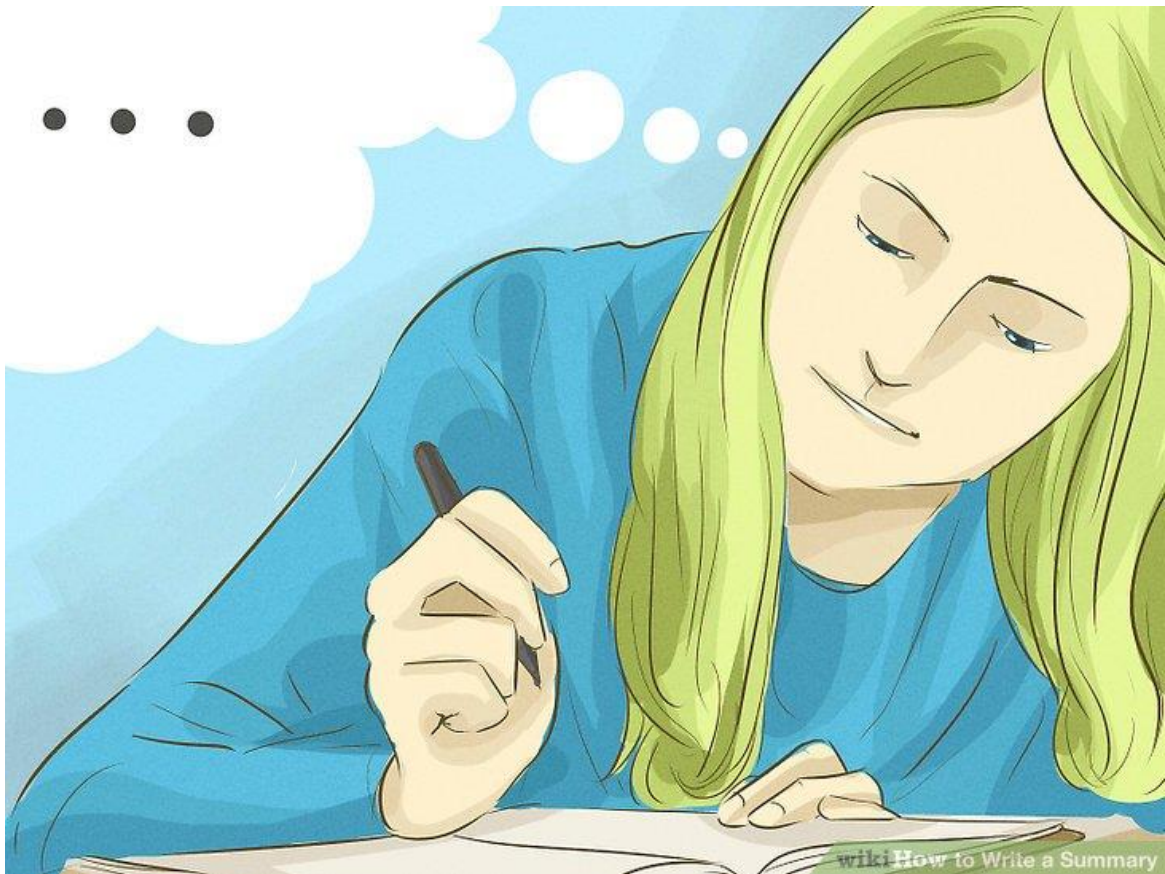
Part 1

Reviewing the Piece



1

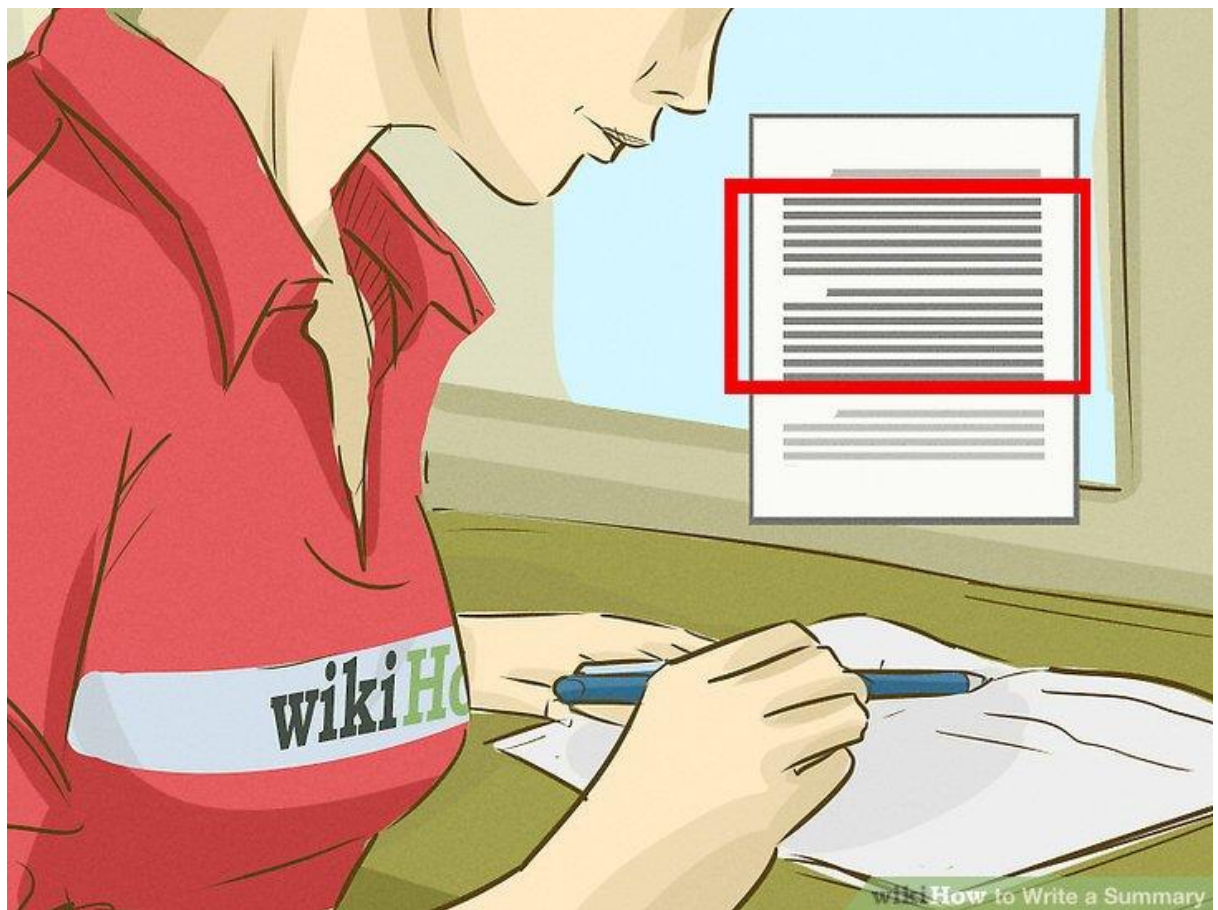
Read the piece thoroughly. You should read it without making any kind of marks. Instead, focus on really understanding what the author is trying to say. This might mean that you need to read one sentence or paragraph more than once. You might also want to reread the whole piece. That's fine.



2

Write down what you think the main point of the piece is. This will help you start to put the piece's arguments in your own words. You can also ask yourself what point or points or themes come up throughout the entire piece. The title can also give you a tip as to the main point of the piece.

- The author might also state their thesis more plainly by saying something like "my argument is...." or *I believe...*
- In a fiction piece, the author will more likely emphasize themes. So if you notice that love - discussions or descriptions of it, for example - come up a lot, one of the main points of the piece is probably love.



3

Reread the piece, taking notes on the major points of it. Once you know for sure what the author's main point is, reread the piece, looking for the ways they support that point. You can find supporting material by looking for details that refer to the title, surprises in the argument or plot, repetition, or a lot of attention to details such as descriptions of characters (if any). Write down each time something like this occurs.

- To put something in your own words, write it down as if you were explaining or describing it to a friend. In that case, you wouldn't just read what the author wrote. Do the same when you're writing down the major points in your own words.



4

Don't focus on the evidence that the author uses to support those points. You only need to know what they're arguing. So, for example, say the author's main argument is: "The U.S. Civil Rights Movement actually began in the 1950s." They might say that black women's boycott of mass transit is an example of this. You only need to note the black women's boycott, not the examples of that boycott that the author uses.

- For fiction pieces, this means avoiding rewriting every single thing that happens in the piece. Focus instead on the major plot points and the main motivator for those points. Don't include everything that happens to the character along the way.

Part 2

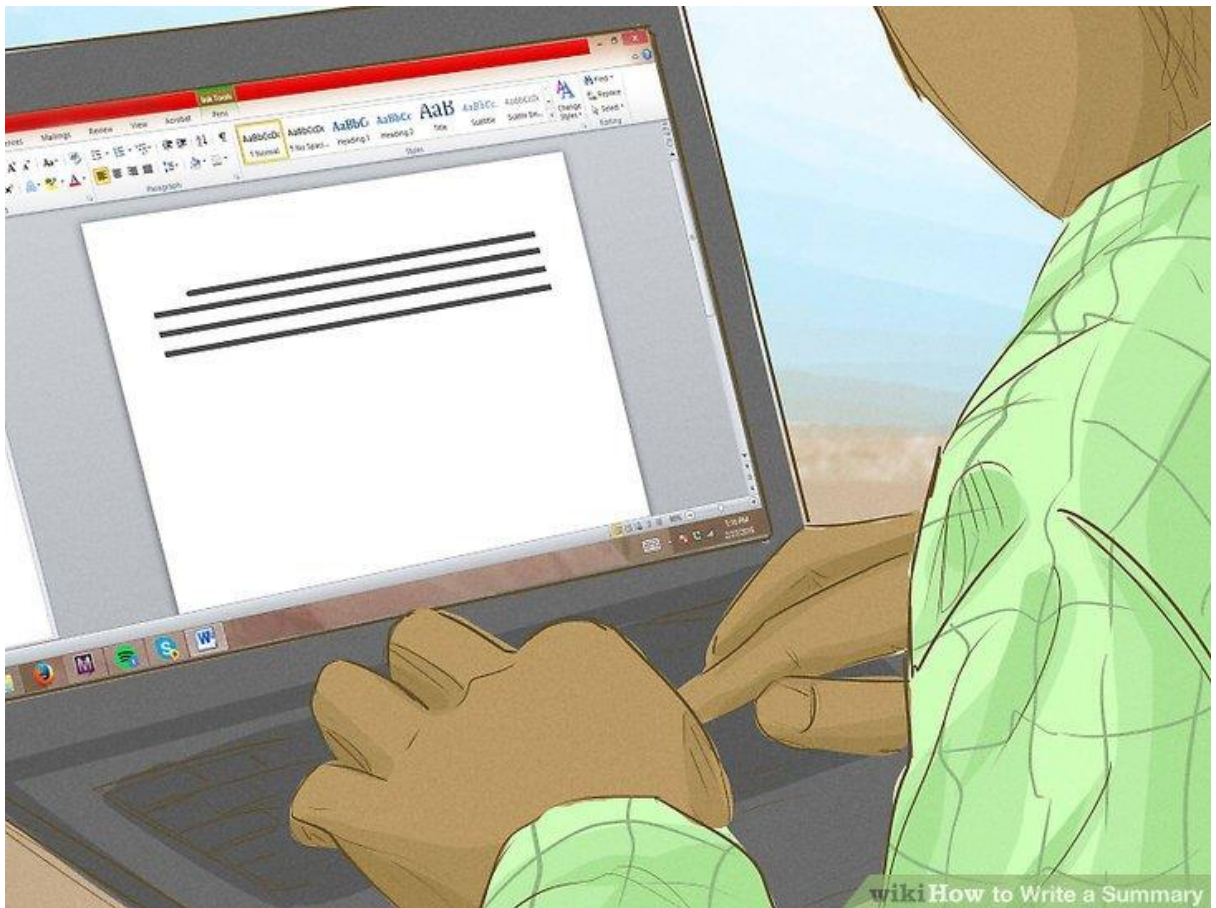
Writing The Summary in Your Own Words



1

Start with the source's information. You should start every summary with the author and the article's title. This lets your reader know that you're summarizing what someone else has written.

- For example, you can start with something like "George Shaw's 'Pygmalion' is a play that addresses issues of class and culture in early twentieth-century England."



2

Work from memory to write the main point of each section. Without looking at your notes, write a first draft that includes the main point of each section in your own words. A summary shouldn't just repeat what the original author said, so using your own words is very important.

- If you absolutely must use the original author's words, put them in quotation marks. This tells your reader those words aren't yours. Not doing this is academic plagiarism, and it can get you in a lot of trouble.
- Make sure you [format the quote](#) correctly!



3

Present the material using the author's point of view. As you write, make sure you're only summarizing the original piece of writing. You shouldn't be inserting your own opinions of the piece or of the events the piece covers. Instead, summarize what the original author said and retain their tone and point of view.

- For example, you might think that Hamlet spends a lot of time thinking and not a lot of time acting. You can say something like, "Hamlet is a man of thought, rather than action," instead of saying, "Why doesn't Hamlet do something once in a while?"



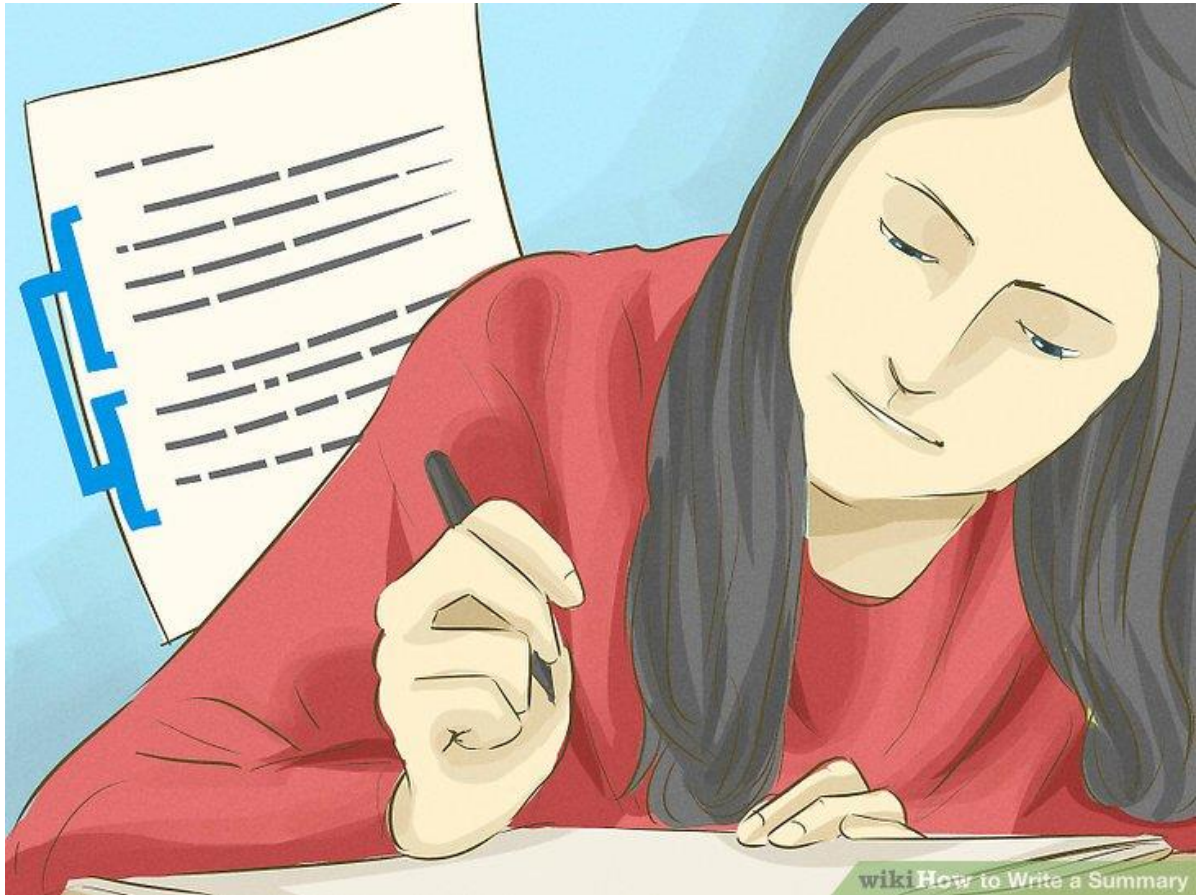
4

Use language appropriate to a summary. You want your reader to know that you're summarizing another person's arguments. So you should occasionally use phrases like "the author argues," or "the article claims" when you're presenting those arguments. This reminds the reader that it's not your piece, but someone else's.

- In fiction pieces, you can say something like "Shakespeare's Hamlet then spends a lot of time brooding on the castle ramparts." This tells your reader you're talking about Shakespeare's play, not inventing your own story.

Part 3

Revising Your Draft into a Coherent Summary



1

Reread the draft you wrote from memory against your notes. Take your notes out and compare them to your from-memory draft. If there's anything major you forgot to include, put it in your second draft.



2

Present the summary in chronological order. Rather than jumping around to different parts of the story or article, you should explain what happened in the sequence that it happened. This is especially important for summarizing works of fiction.



3

Eliminate repetition. Sometimes in an article or book, the author might make the same point multiple times as a way to underline their main points. In your summary, you don't need to do this. When you're rereading your summary, delete any repetitive points – even if the author makes them multiple times, you only need to make them once.

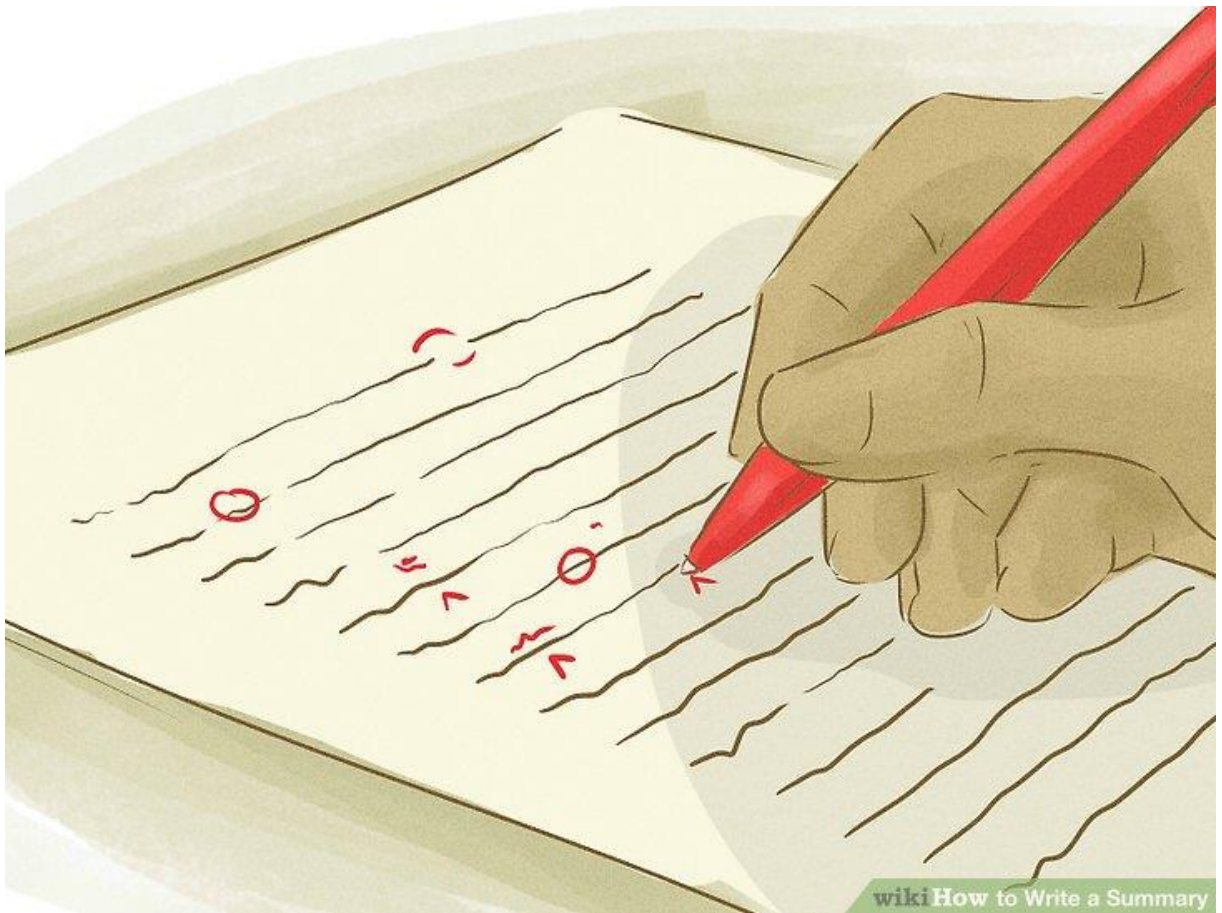
- If you notice an author has made the same point multiple times, though, it's a good indicator that this is an important point, and it should definitely be in your summary.



4

Add transitions where necessary. If you're focused on getting all of the main points down, you might not be paying attention to how the paragraphs of your summary fit together. When you revise, make sure that you connect each paragraph to the next, and back to the main point.

- For example, in a summary of an article about the cause of the American Revolution, you might have a paragraph that summarizes the author's arguments about taxes, and another about religious freedom. You can say something like, "Although some colonists believed that taxes should entitle them to representation in Parliament, the author also argues that other colonists supported the Revolution because they believed they were entitled to representation in heaven on their own terms."



5

Check for grammatical and spelling errors. Once you've finished revising the arguments in your draft, check the little things. Make sure there are no spelling or grammar mistakes. Look for any additional or missing punctuation and correct that as well.

- Don't use spell-checker for spelling errors. It will catch if you spell something wrong, but not if you use the wrong spelling of a word. For example, it won't catch that you used "there" when you meant "their."



6

Check your length. Once you've added anything you might have forgotten to your summary, check how long it is. If you're summarizing something for a school assignment, be sure to stick to the parameters or guidelines provided by your instructor.

- Generally, a summary should be around one quarter the length of the original piece. So if the original piece is 4 pages long, your summary should be no more than 1 page.