

- In a summary of someone else’s writing, the tone or “voice” of the original author disappears—along with that writer’s way of seeing. In some cases, this can be a form of plagiarism.

A summary that fails to capture the real story

A summary’s tip-of-the-iceberg view can alter any reader’s accurate interpretation of the issue or event, as in the following headline that summarizes the story but distorts the facts: “Study: Cannabis Makes Drivers More Cautious.” This headline from the August 21, 2000 *Ottawa Citizen* is accompanied by the following summary on page A1: “Driving while high is less dangerous than while fatigued or drunk.” Unless they turn to page A2, readers never encounter the essential fact that “Experts agree that driving while high is not as safe as driving while sober.”

Informed decisions about science and technological controversies (human cloning, bioengineered foods, global warming, estrogen therapy) require an informed public. And while summaries do have their place in our busy world, scanning headlines or abstracts is no substitute for detailed reading and careful weighing of the facts. The more complex the topic, the more readers need the whole story.

#### NOTE

For more advice about quotations, paraphrases, and summaries (including examples), go to <[www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/QuotingSources.html](http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/QuotingSources.html)>.

### ✓ Checklist: Usability of Summaries

Use this checklist to refine your summaries. (Page numbers in parentheses refer to first page of discussion.)

#### Content

- Does the summary contain only the essential message? (174)
- Does the summary make sense as an independent piece? (175)
- Is the summary accurate when checked against the original? (175)
- Is the summary free of any additions to the original? (176)
- Is the summary free of needless details? (175)
- Is the summary economical yet clear and comprehensive? (175)
- Is the source documented? (176)
- Does the descriptive abstract tell what the original is about? (184)

#### Organization

- Is the summary coherent? (206)
- Are there enough transitions to reveal the line of thought? (693)

#### Style

- Is the summary’s level of technicality appropriate for its audience? (175)
- Is the summary free of needless words? (175)
- Are all sentences clear, concise, and fluent? (216)
- Is the summary written grammatically? (670)