

# Ten Percent Summary

## A Student's Guide

The Ten Percent Summary from the Collins Writing Program requires you to summarize nonfiction texts in a very specific format. Completing these assignments will increase your knowledge and improve your reading, writing, and research skills. Many teachers ask students to summarize information, but often students do not know how little or how much to write. The Ten Percent Summary solves this problem by letting you know that your summary should have the following three characteristics:

- 1. The summary begins with a specific type of topic sentence called S “T” A r t; that is, a sentence with the source underlined, the title in quotes, the authors capitalized, the right verb used, and the topic stated.**
- 2. The summary describes two to four of the central ideas in the order they appear in the original text, in your own words, and without your personal opinion.**
- 3. The summary is approximately 10 percent of the words of the original text.**

The more of these summaries you do, the more you'll read, remember, write, and research—all skills critical to your success.

## TIPS FOR WRITING THE TEN PERCENT SUMMARY

- **Length:** Before you begin, make sure you know the length of the text because this will determine the length of your summary. Usually, your teachers will tell you the expected length of the summary. If they do not, it's easy to determine how much you should write—approximately 10 percent of the words of the original text.

If you use Collins Writing paper, you can estimate how much you should write or how much you've written. Collins paper has a heading at the top for Focus Correction Areas (FCAs), points, name and date, and 10 lines to write on. The average student writes 7 to 8 words per line, so if you fill the first page, you'll have written about 75 words. The second page, with no heading, has 13 lines. If you fill both pages, you'll have approximately 175 words. Since most texts or articles you will summarize are between 750 and 2,000 words, you can make a good estimate of how much to write and how much detail to add. If you type, remember that you can check your word count in your word-processing software. Most double-spaced pages have 250 words.

- **Central Ideas:** Begin by listing the two to four central ideas in the order they appear in the original source, and then rewrite these ideas into your own sentences. Check your word count; this will give you a sense of how much more detail you need to include before exceeding the word or space limit.

TIP: Do not begin with "The first central idea is" or "I'll tell you the second central idea now." Simply begin with "First" or "Second." Also, do not use *I*, *me*, or *mine* in the summary.

- **No Opinions or Feelings:** Do not include your own opinions or feelings about the text. Although important, your opinions and feelings do not belong in an objective summary; therefore, avoid sentences that start with "I feel that" or "In my opinion."
- **S "T" A r t Topic Sentence:** Create the S "T" A r t (Source, "Title," **A**uthors, right verb, **t**opic) topic sentence. The topic sentence can be up to 15 to 30 words, depending on the length of the title, the source, and your topic. When you describe the topic, try to use different words from those in the title. The right verb can be the most challenging element of the S "T" A r t sentence. You must determine the author's purpose and turn that into a verb. Does the author describe, evaluate, or argue? Avoid verbs that state the obvious such as *says*, *tells*, or *writes*.

→ Example: In an article entitled "My Life as a Nurse" from the *Journal of Autobiography* by Florence Nightingale, you could write an S "T" A r t topic sentence like this: In the *Journal of Autobiography's* article "My Life as a Nurse," Florence Nightingale describes how she dedicated her life to helping the sick and suffering. You do not want to write, "... Florence Nightingale describes her life as a nurse." It is too much like the title.

- **No Plagiarism:** To avoid plagiarism, take notes as you read, and write your summary from your notes.
- **Short Quotes:** Consider using one or two short quotes of three to five words, especially if they help the reader get a feel for the writer's voice, style, or tone. Remember, though, that the summary should be *your* words, with only a few short quotes from the text.