

Be bullet proof for your exams



Exams are coming up and a lot of learners and students have not learned to summarise their work well. Have you ever wondered how to summarise?

A useful summary is more than just a condensed or shortened version of your work. A good summary requires you to analyse your study material, identify the key concepts and to explain it in your own words.

So, why make summaries?

Summaries increase your understanding of the content and make it easier for you to remember the most important points for the exam. You should get into the habit of reviewing and summarising your notes at home on a daily basis, therefore maximising your study time. Leaving all of your summarising to just before the test/exam is stressful and time-consuming. Rather do a little each day and then use the time before exams for revising the work you have summarised. Summarising re-enforces what you have learnt that day, ensuring that you have fully understood the work and if not, allowing you time to ask your teacher questions the next day while the topic is still under discussion in the classroom. After all, your brain learns best when it knows something already and builds up on it.

Simply highlighting or underlining and then rereading your original notes is not enough. By writing out summaries the material enters your long-term memory making it easier to recall in the exam.

Prepare to summarize

Become organised as it is no good having summaries for different subjects all mixed together and scattered between other materials.

- Have a separate file or book for each subject
- Use dividers or tabs to separate the different sections
- Arrange your study material into a format which suits your learning style.
- Store all of your summary files or books together

Remember the most effective summaries are made for you, by you!

How to make a summary

- Keep it brief, your summary should be headings and key points which remind you of the main material to be remembered, not a rewrite of the course material.
- Write your summary in your own words so that you understand it, but never add your own ideas or opinions.
- Reduce your notes to short manageable pieces which are easy to memorise.

STEP 1

Understand your material before you start to summarise. Read through all of the material to get an overview, don't make notes yet. Read it again if necessary until you truly understand it. Look up words or concepts that you don't understand along the way, this ensures the material makes more sense.

STEP 2

Now reread the material for meaning, underlining or highlighting the most important information that you need to remember and making notes in the margins to add clarification to the content. Identify key concepts and supporting facts and note the headings and subheadings or divide the information into sections to organise your summary. Think of the focus – who, what, when, when, why.

Remember at this stage that LESS is MORE, you are not wanting to rewrite your notes but you need to rethink them explaining the essential information in your own words.

STEP 3

Reread the material crossing out unnecessary information. This is the information that is not necessary for understanding or has been repeated. Reduce the notes so you are left with mostly key lines, phrases, half sentences and lists in point form.

STEP 4

Draft the summary with what is left into your own words. You can write it in either full sentences or point form, draw pictures, use colours whichever learning style you prefer. Ensure your points make sense to you. Use phrases instead of full sentences, use words instead of phrases and keep some words/terms as is e.g definitions, quotations specific facts and formulas. Check that you have kept the essential information. Aim for 10-25% of the original text, if your summary is too detailed and too long then create a summary of your summary.

Preparing a summary is not a 1-step process. What is important is that you are left with a concise learning aid which will give a more forceful impression in your memory.

Different variations of Summaries

Depending on your learning style you can adapt your summaries to suit you (go to www.eq-advantagedge.co.za to take a test and find out your learning style). Visual learners may prefer to draw charts or mind maps/ spider diagrams using visual symbols, colour and shapes. Auditory learners find it beneficial recording the summaries onto audio and playing it back a number of times. They can also convert their summaries onto flash cards and “teach” their favourite teddy bear by reading the summaries out loud or having a question and answer session.

MIND MAPS – also known as Spider Diagrams

Mind maps are a visual methods of summarising information which helps you to see the overall structure of a subject and how everything relates as well as the necessary facts. You start with the main concept in the middle and then the related concepts all branch out from there. So you get to see the big picture and how everything connects.

Encouraged to make use of colours, images and words (not sentences), mind mapping works the way the brain works, which is not in nice neat lines.

FLASH CARDS

These are pieces of card with questions on one side and the answers on the other side. You can add in pictures or other visual images to help you memorise the concepts.

Whichever method of summarising you choose remember that good summarising skills take practice.

If you want to learn more about better techniques to study and to remember your work better, join the next Re-Mind course at EQ-Advantagedge in Durban. (www.eq-advantagedge.co.za).



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