

How to Summarize

A good summary presents all the main ideas by answering the questions who, what, when, where, why, and how—if that information is included in the passage. Someone reading a summary should be able to understand the ideas in the original passage without actually reading it. Here are some tips to help you to summarize what you read:

- Read carefully and identify the main ideas or events.
- Retell the ideas and events in your own words, using a logical sentence.
- Paraphrase and condense the information, but check to be sure your summary is complete and clear.

Read the following original passage from *Black Boy* and the summary. Does the summary include all the important details?

Original

I dreamed of going north and writing books, novels. The North symbolized to me all that I had not felt and seen; it had no relation whatever to what actually existed. Yet, by imagining a place where everything was possible, I kept hope alive in me. But where had I got this notion of doing something in the future, of going away from home and accomplishing something that would be recognized by others?

Summary

Wright wanted to go north, to a place where life would be different, and become a well-known writer, but he is unsure how he came to have this dream.

The summary tells *who* (Wright, the speaker); wanted *what* (to go north); *when* (in the future); to do *what* (become a writer); *why* (to accomplish something with his life).

Read the article below and then answer the questions that follow. Use your answers to help you write a brief summary of the passage.

Four hundred Canadian soldiers, some riding in armored vehicles, came to Toronto on Friday to help Canada's largest city deal with snowstorms that have brought commerce and transportation to a standstill. The latest storm began around midday yesterday and was expected to add ten inches of snow to the thirty inches that have fallen since the beginning of the year. The massive snowfalls have slowed the city's subway, trolley, and commuter rail systems. Most employees have been urged by their companies to remain at home. Yesterday, those who did manage to get to work generally went home early.

The soldiers are expected to help clear roadways and keep traffic flowing. The city of Toronto also called in work crews from as far away as Montreal to assist with the clearing operation. Side streets and thoroughfares remained so badly clogged with snow that driving and even walking was almost impossible.

1. Who?
2. When?
3. Where?
4. Why?
5. Summary: