



This summary writing checklist was developed by the OERE (<http://oere.oise.utoronto.ca/>) in order to increase the efficiency of our summary writing process and the quality of our research summaries. The checklist was written by Shasta Carr-Harris, Project Manager of the OERE, in consultation with the 2012 OERE summary writing team. It has also been informed by an unpublished writing guide developed by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) (<http://www.camh.ca/en/hospital/Pages/home.aspx>), a Research Snapshot Template developed by the Research Impact program at York University (<http://www.researchimpact.ca/researchsearch/>), which provides the basic structure of all OERE summaries, and has been informed by Amara, Ouimet, & Landry (2004) and Nutley, Walter, & Davies (2007) (see references below). For more information, please contact Shasta Carr-Harris at shasta.carr.harris@utoronto.ca or via twitter [@ShastaCH](https://twitter.com/ShastaCH)

Before you begin

Tip: Ensure summary is relevant and useful to your target audience

It is important to have a clear understanding of your target audience before you begin writing a summary. Your target audience will have specific professional needs and you will want to consider why and how reading your research summary will help your target audience meet their needs. Knowing your target audience will help you determine which research articles you should prioritize for summary - for example, you may want to summarize research articles that are directly relevant and useful to your target audience first – and will also help you clarify what you should include in the “How you can use this research summary” (see p. 4 below).

Tip: Save time

Summaries will take between 4-6 hours (or longer) to write. To ensure time is not wasted, it is useful to skim and scan each research article before writing, particularly the *Abstract*, *Findings* and *Conclusion* sections. This will help you determine whether the research study is relevant and useful to your target audience.

Further, depending on the needs of your target audience, you may not choose to summarize the literature review section of the research article. For this reason, a summary writer may not need to read this section in great depth.

Tip: Length

Summaries can vary in length and an appropriate balance needs to be found between providing concise information in a brief summary without over simplifying the research and compromising the quality of the summary. Generally, 2 to 4 pages are enough to capture the key elements of an article.

Tip: Visuals

Include visuals whenever possible, as visuals are capable of summarizing a great deal of information in a small space, and grab the reader’s attention. Make sure the visuals are easy to read/understand, though. Poor or overly complex visuals may detract readers.



Headline

This is the “hook” that grabs the interest of the potential reader and entices them to read the Snapshot. The headline can be a question which the Snapshot answers:

“Are girls really better readers?”

Or, it can be a simplified version of the article’s title:

“The Relationship between Student Self-Efficacy and Ability in Reading and Writing”

Tip: write the *Headline* near the end when you have a complete picture of the article and your summary in mind.

What is this research about? (3-5 sentences)

Key things to include:

- Highlight the purpose of the study
- Include the research question (rewritten in plain language)
- Define any terms necessary

What did the researchers do? (5-10 sentences)

This section is based on the methods/methodology section of the article.

Things to include:

- How did the researchers collect data?
 - If the researchers administered a survey, provide details: online or paper survey? Open-ended or close-ended questions used?
 - Provide examples of key questions asked (2-4 examples)



- Provide examples of answers participants had to choose from (2-3 examples to give the reader a sense of how participants could respond)
- If interviews were conducted were these: in person, over the phone, etc.? What were the key questions asked? Provide examples of questions.

Note: the description of the questions asked in a survey or interview should match the purpose of the study, as you have described it in the “What is this research about” section of the summary.

- Number of people sampled?
- How were participants selected (inclusion/exclusion criteria)?
- Final number of people who participated in the study?
- Demographics (or other key characteristics) of the final participants in the study?

Note: Importance of including sample size and participant characteristics

The number of participants included in the study and the characteristics of the final participants are both critical pieces of information as they suggest how “generalizable” the findings from this study are. That said, you may not find that every study includes this information. In this case, you may want to contact the researcher for this information or you may want to draw your audience’s attention to this in the summary by noting that this information is missing and therefore the reader should be cautious when generalizing the findings.

What did the researchers find? (5-10 sentences)

Things to include:

- Key findings from the study, rather than *every* finding from the study.

When describing findings make sure to make these as clear as possible by giving specific details:

- Numbers: how many people reported X? How many test results were found to be X? etc;



- Provide a few examples whenever possible.

Instead of:

The researchers found that a majority of teachers had a positive view of the after school literacy program.

Be specific:

The researchers found that the majority of teachers surveyed (35 out of 40) had a positive view of the after school literacy program. Specifically, teachers reported that it was easy to deliver as it did not require a lot of pre-planning or extra resources.

Tip: Bulleted lists

The nature of the results will determine the layout of this section. For a study with 3 or more results it may be best to use a bulleted list, which can make the information more organized and simpler to digest visually. Also, remember to be as specific as possible when presenting key findings as this will help practitioners understand how this study is relevant to their practice.

How can you use this research? (3-7 sentences)

- Identify **who** would be interested in the findings from this study (remember to focus on your target audience). For example, if your target audience is educational practitioners in schools you may want to include different ways that teachers, principals, vice principals, and/or educational assistants can use the research.
- Provide suggestions as to **how** this research can be used by practitioners. This section may invite practitioners to use research conceptually or instrumentally. In either case, any recommendations about how to use the research should follow logically from the findings of the research study:

Conceptual use: research is used to shed light on situations and problems in one's field of work (Amara, Ouimet, Landry, 2004).

The research could help practitioners:

- Identify or understand issues/problems better or from different perspectives;
- Understand why action is required;
- Know which stakeholder can or should be consulted when addressing issues/problems;



- Understand the programs/policies/practices that can be used to address issues/problems and in which context different programs/policies/practices are most effective;
- Understand the different methods available to implement programs/policies/practices, etc.;

(Adapted from Nutley, Walter, Davies, 2007)

Instrumental use: research has a direct impact on policy and/or practice decisions (Amara, Ouimet, Landry, 2004).

The research may help practitioners take action to:

- Learn and implement evidence-based methods;
- Implement organizational programs/policies/practices based on research evidence that can be used to address issues/problems;
- Consult with stakeholders to develop policies/programs/practices founded in research evidence;
- Provide staff training that help practitioners learn evidence-based methods;
- Etc...

What you need to know (3-4 sentences):

This section is a very brief overview of the summary - what the study is about and an overview of the findings. This section can be put into a highlighted box on the top right hand side of the first page, so that practitioners can quickly decide whether this research summary will be useful to them.

Example:

This study examined the factors that impact a young person's decision to pursue university education in Canada. The researchers found that family income and level of parental education were important factors. The researchers also found an increasing gender gap between male and female participation, with more young women attending university than young men.



Things to include:

- 1 sentence description of the study;
- 1-2 sentence general description of finding;

Original research article

You will want to provide readers with a citation and link to the full research article whenever possible.

About the researchers

In this section, you can include a very brief bio (1-2 sentences) on each of the researchers.

References

Include any other references cited in article, if applicable.

Keywords

If you are adding your summaries to an online database, it is important to include key words with which to “tag” each summary. Then, when practitioners search the database using these key terms, their search will lead to the summary.

Tip: It is best to tag the summary with all relevant keywords to give your audience the greatest chance of finding the summary when searching an online database.

About this summary

In this section you can include a very brief description of the team that developed the summary and a link to your website.



References

Amara, N., Ouimet, M., & Landry, R. (2004). New evidence on instrumental, conceptual, and symbolic utilization of university research in government agencies. *Science Communication, 26*(1), 75-106.

Nutley, S. M., Walter, I., & Davies, H. T. (2007). *Using evidence: How research can inform public services*. The Policy Press.