

PREPARING A PROJECT SUMMARY

A **project summary** provides a brief overview of a research, creative, or other innovative project. This concise statement summarizes your larger project, conveying key information to help readers understand:

- the purpose of your project,
- the steps you took to achieve your project goals and objectives, and
- the results, outcomes, and implications of your project.

The summary can take many forms. Depending on your field, this may look like an abstract, an artist statement, a synopsis of your written work, or an overview of your prototype or entrepreneurial endeavor.

There are typically three parts to a project summary: **introduction, body, and conclusion.**

INTRODUCTION

Start by sharing the problem, topic, or focus of your project. Include key information on the importance of the project, its purpose, and the gaps in the research the study is addressing.

- What are your research questions or goals?
- What is your thesis statement?
- What is the problem you are solving or the need you are meeting?
- What are the artistic intentions or motivations informing the project?

BODY

Next, move into what you've done to research, explore, study, and analyze your topic, or engage in the creative endeavor. State your results or outcomes clearly.

- Describe your study, your research methods, and/or the steps you have taken to address the problem or need.
- Describe the creative process.
- What was learned through the study? Explain your results (preliminary findings are perfectly acceptable) and describe the outcomes of your work.
- Explain the outcomes or products of your creative endeavor.

CONCLUSION

Finish by explaining why your results are interesting, as well as what they mean to your field or discipline. Provide recommendations for next steps or areas in need of further study.

- What are the implications of your work? Outline how your work contributed to the current state of knowledge.
- What can be done moving forward with this knowledge?
- How will this work inform future creative endeavors?

AUDIENCE

When writing a project summary, it is essential to keep your audience in mind. Frontiers in Undergraduate Research reaches a **general audience**. When writing for a general audience, simplify your content and avoid overwhelming your readers with technical jargon and acronyms that are not widely recognized outside of your field of study. Also, it is important to clearly interpret your results and explain the importance of your work in accessible language.

Since you are so deeply familiar with every aspect of your project, it can be challenging to identify the places where definitions, explanations, or alternate terminology might be needed. One strategy is to **seek feedback** from readers who are less familiar with your project and your field, such as friends or family members. Ask these "audience members" for very specific feedback: Were there any terms they didn't understand in the context of your project summary? Did they understand what you did and why you did it? Were they left with unanswered questions? Their feedback on these points can guide the revision of your project summary.

PROJECT SUMMARY: ADDITIONAL TIPS

Distilling a larger body of work, such as a thesis, academic paper, or body of creative works, into a 250-word summary can be challenging. The tips that follow offer strategies to help you with this task.

- Review your longer written work and **identify key passages** that capture important content. This can be done by summarizing each section of your paper, compiling the information you want readers to take away from that section. Alternately, you can review each paragraph of your longer paper and pull key passages from those paragraphs. These summary sentences or key passages can be used to outline your project summary.
- Treat this as a **pitch or elevator speech**. Imagine you are sharing your work in person. How would you describe your project in a one-minute elevator speech to those in attendance? Record yourself speaking or write down what you would say and use that as a foundation for your project summary.
- Once you have a working draft of your summary, go through your writing with a critical eye and **edit**. Review each sentence to determine if there are unnecessary words or ways to shorten your writing without losing key content and meaning.
- **Look for redundancies**. In a concise statement, each sentence needs to propel the summary forward and avoid restating previously addressed information.
- **Read your summary aloud** to assure it flows well and to catch spelling and grammatical errors.
- **Seek feedback** from trusted advisors, mentors, and the Writing Center to ensure your summary is clear, strong, and effective. Their expert perspectives should complement the feedback you've sought from friends and family unfamiliar with your project (see "Audience" on the reverse side of this handout).

PREPARING A PROJECT REFLECTION

Beyond sharing information about the project you have pursued, Frontiers represents an opportunity to share **what you've learned** through your engagement in research and creative activity. You may already have a clear sense of your takeaways from your project, you may still feel too immersed in the experience to have identified any lessons learned, or you may fall somewhere in between. In any case, the following sets of prompts may provide useful structure for reflecting on what you learned by engaging in research or creative activity.

I LEARNED...

- I learned...
- I learned this when...
- This matters because...
- I will use this knowledge to...

THEN AND NOW

- What have I come to see differently because of my experience with this project?
- What do I know now that I didn't know then?
- What do I know now about what I *don't* know?

WHATS

- What? (What did I learn?)
- So what? (Why does it matter?)
- Now what? (How will I build on this learning?)

WHAT HAVE I LEARNED ABOUT...

- The process of research or creative activity?
- Myself, my strengths, and my areas for growth?
- How I learn and what conditions support my learning?
- My educational goals and career goals?

SKILLS

- How did I develop these skills through my work on this project?
- How did I demonstrate these skills through my work on this project?

Critical thinking/problem solving

Teamwork/collaboration

Leadership

Oral/written communications

Technology

Professionalism/work ethic

Self-awareness & career management

Global perspective

Research-specific skills