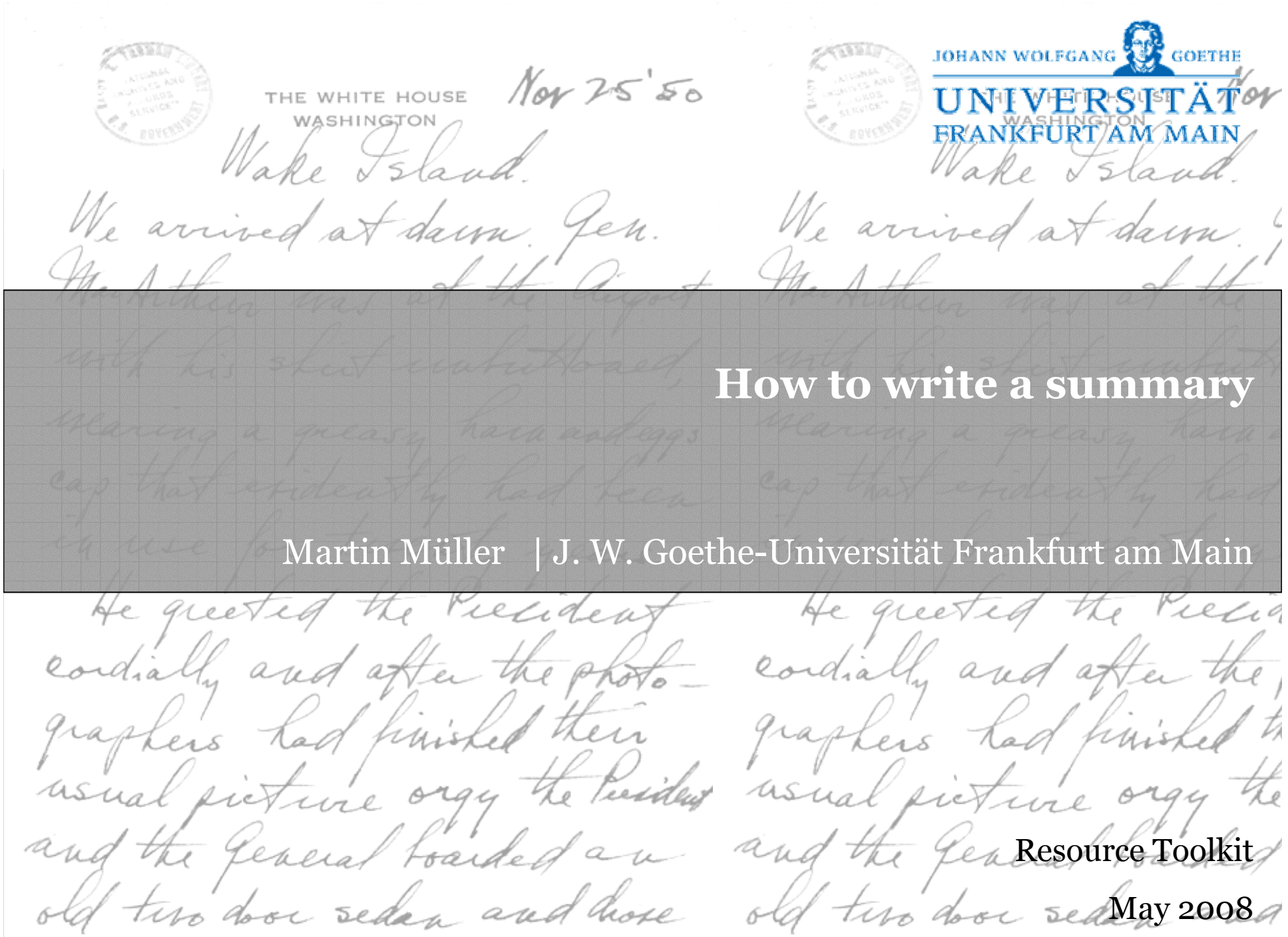


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How to write a summary

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Resource Toolkit

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Note: This material serves as a guide for students in my seminars and does not claim to have general validity.

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Outline

1. What is a summary (for)?
2. Six steps
3. Dos and Don‘ts

1. What is a summary (for)? |
2. Six steps to a good summary |
3. Dos and Don’ts |

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Outline

1. What is a summary (for)?
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1. What is a summary (for)? |

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What is a (academic) summary?

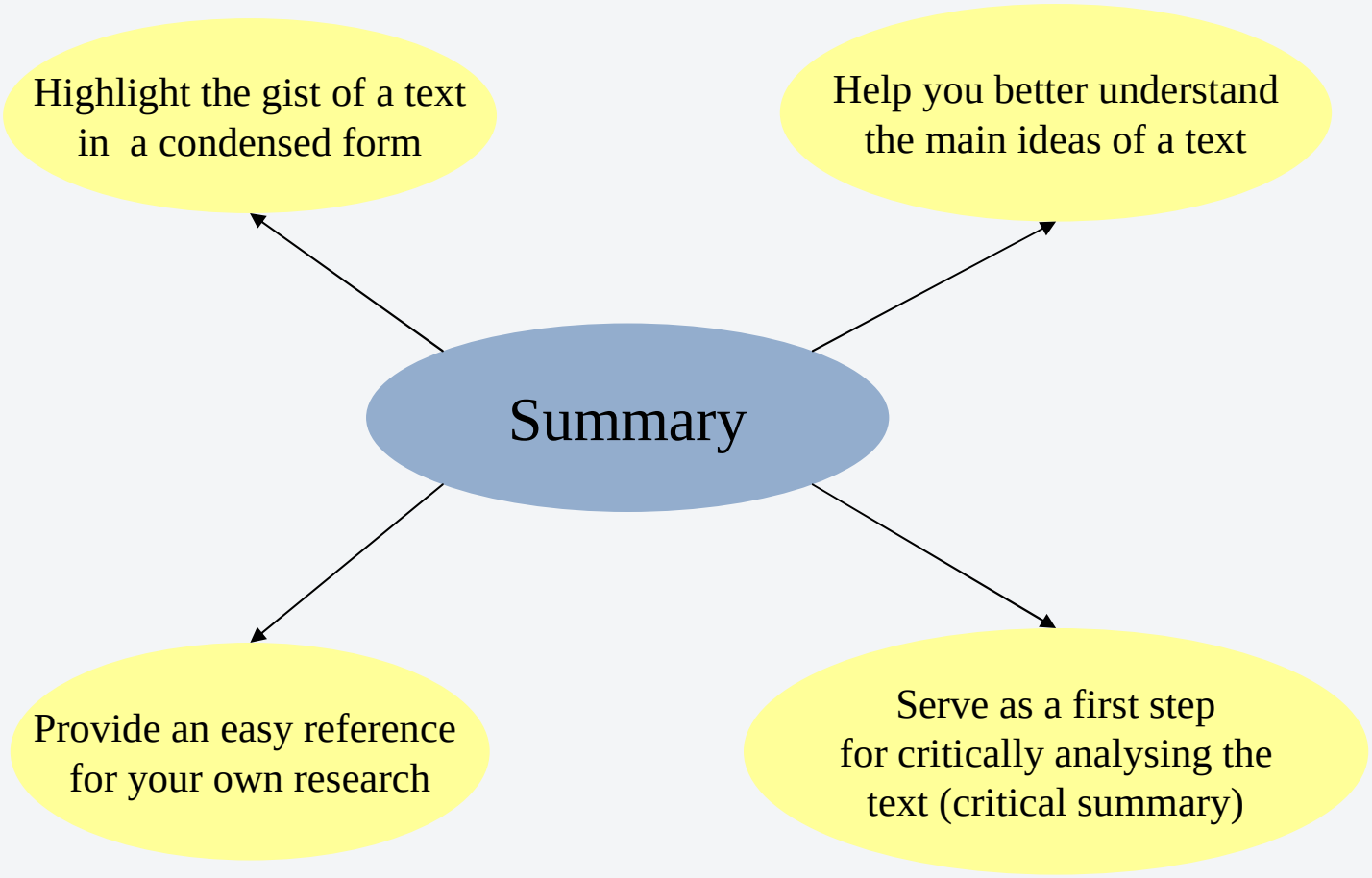
1. What is a summary (for)?
2. Six steps
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Summaries…

- … condense an original text by increasing the level of abstraction.
- … present the key points of an argument and therefore require to distinguish between main and subsidiary information.
- … have a clearly arranged structure and are written in a logical and traceable fashion.
- … reflect only the opinion of the original writer, paraphrased with new words.

Purposes of a (academic) summary

1. What is a summary (for)?
2. Six steps
3. Dos and Don‘ts



Outline

1. What is a summary (for)? |
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1. What is a summary (for)?
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Step 1: Create a header!

1. What is a summary (for)?
2. Six steps
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Every summary has a header. The header contains the following elements:

- a complete reference of the source summarised
- the date you did the summary
- your name if you have to hand in the summary

Example of a header:

Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO). 2006. *World agriculture: towards 2030/2050*. Rome: FAO, pp. 8-29.

Martin Müller, 30 April 2008

Step 2: Draft a structural outline!

1. What is a summary (for)?
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It is easier to find the information in your summary if it is properly structured.

Thus plan the structure of your summary beforehand.

o identify the main sections of the text
o assign a paragraph in your summary to every main section
o think of a brief description of the information for every paragraph

Your paragraph descriptions should now reflect the content of the key sections

Example of a structural outline:

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1) World food situation: historical developments and
   present situation
2) Prospects for the future
3) Structural changes in the food commodity composition
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Step 3: Develop the main arguments

1. What is a summary (for)?
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Now try to capture the essence of what is said in the text.

- Use key words to sum up the main arguments in every section.
- What means of support are used for the argument?
- try to develop a logical train of thought (connectors like "but", "therefore", "despite", "however" etc. are often helpful).
- Do not necessarily follow the order of the original. If some points at different points of the original text belong to the same argument, rearrange them accordingly.
- Delete most details and examples, unimportant information, anecdotes, examples, illustrations, data etc.
- Do not forget to include the page numbers (so you find the argument in the original text).
- If required, plan your text length by assigning word limits to every paragraph.

Example of a main argument for one section

1. What is a summary (for)?
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2) prospects for the future (100 words)


projections of food consumption use two variables:
population growth and economic growth; population growth
will slow down but still result in significant absolute
increases, economic growth will pick up: THEREFORE
positive outlook for food consumption, by 2015 approaching
3000 kcal/person/day (pp. 16-19); result: declining
proportion of people undernourished; BUT: modest
reductions in the number of undernourished; only in 2030
the 2015 aim (World Food Summit) will be reached (p. 20);
```

Step 4: Write your summary

1. What is a summary (for)?
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Now translate the key words into whole sentences.

- Keep the sentences crisp and short wherever possible.
- Try to be concrete. Avoid overgeneralisations.
- Use your own words.
- Simplify the text. Reduce complex sentences to simple sentences, simple sentences to phrases, phrases to single words.
- Avoid metatext such as „the author claims", „the authors describe" etc. Since doing a summary, it is obvious that you are representing the point of view of an external text.
- Do not forget to include page numbers of the original text.
- Add a word count at the end of your document.

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Example for a paragraph from a summary

1. What is a summary (for)?
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> Projections of the future development of food consumption use two main variables: population growth and economic growth. Population growth is expected to continue in the next 50 years, however at declining growth rates. Economic growth rates are forecasted to pick up significantly (p. 16f). As a consequence, food consumption is expected to rise, resulting in a declining *proportion* of people undernourished. However, due to population growth, reduction in the absolute *number* of people undernourished is expected to be modest (p. 20).

Step 5: Revise, revise, revise.

1. What is a summary (for)?
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Nobody can do a good summary in a single shot. Having written a first version, you will see where you missed important things or included unimportant ones.

Check…

- … whether every important point is included.
- … whether you have mentioned obsolete details.
- … whether the argument makes sense in the condensed form.
- … whether you keep within the word limit.

Then rewrite the summary in those places where you find it does not satisfy the above checklist.

Step 6: Final check

1. What is a summary (for)?
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Before handing in your summary make sure that …

- … that the meaning is the same as in the original text.
- … that the style is your own.
- … that you have included page references.
- … that you have a word count.

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Outline

1. What is a summary (for)? |
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What you should do

1. What is a summary (for)?
2. Six steps
3. Dos and Don'ts

Do...

- ... stay close to the text in what you write but do not plagiarise.
- ... number your pages.
- ... avoid overly detailed accounts.
- ... adhere to the formal guidelines for assignments of your department.
- ... be careful when translating terms from a foreign language. It is important but may be difficult to find a good equivalent.

What you should avoid

1.
What is a summary (for)?

2.
Six steps

3.
Dos and Don'ts

- Do *not* normally use bullet points, except perhaps in highly technical enumerations.
- Do *not* use direct quotations frequently. Paraphrase in your own words.
- Do *not* give your own opinion unless explicitly asked for. In contrast to a review, a summary contains neither interpretation nor rating.
- Do *not* normally change technical terms or specialised vocabulary. They denote a specific concept for which there are usually few exact synonyms.
- Do not simply enumerate points. Connect them to form a coherent argument.