

Summarizing a long text with precision

French B2 (upper intermediate) · Lesson

Quick answer: To summarize a text in French, keep only the author's main ideas, restate them in your own words in the present tense and third person, link them with connectors, and respect the word limit. Leave out opinions, examples, quotations and anecdotes. A margin of 10 % is usually accepted.

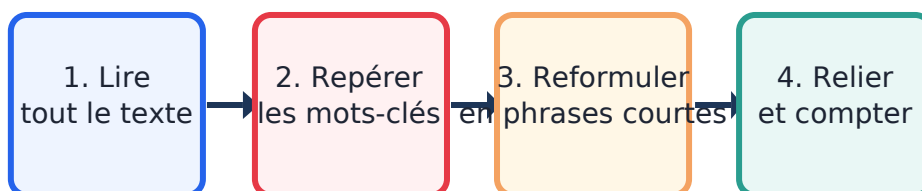
Level: French B2 (CEFR upper intermediate) · **Standards:** CEFR B2, Writing

How do you summarize a long text in French?

Le résumé

A résumé keeps the ideas of the author, in your own words, in far fewer words. It has no opinion, no quotation, no example and no anecdote. It is written in the present tense, in the third person: L'auteur explique que... — The author explains that...

Work in four moves: read the whole text once, mark the main idea of every paragraph, rebuild each idea in a short sentence, then link the sentences with connectors and count your words.



The four moves of a good summary.

How do you shorten a sentence without losing the idea?

Reformulation means saying the same thing with fewer, more abstract words. Five tools do most of the work.

Tool	Original	Shorter
Verb becomes noun	Les prix ont augmenté.	la hausse des prix
List becomes one word	les bus, les trams et le métro	les transports en commun
Relative clause becomes adjective	un quartier où il y a peu de bruit	un quartier calme

Tool	Original	Shorter
Clause becomes phrase	parce qu'il y a une grève	à cause de la grève
Two sentences become one	Il pleut. Le match est annulé.	Le match est annulé à cause de la pluie.

Which connectors keep the logic of the original?

Relation	Connector	Meaning
Addition	de plus, en outre	moreover
Cause	en effet, car	indeed, because
Consequence	par conséquent, donc	therefore
Contrast	cependant, en revanche	however, on the other hand
Concession	bien que + subjunctive	although
Conclusion	en somme, finalement	in short, finally

Reporting verbs to avoid repeating dire

- L'auteur **souligne** que... — points out that
- Le texte **dénonce** le manque de... — denounces
- Selon l'article, la ville **doit**... — according to the article
- Elle **conclut** que... — concludes that

How many words should the summary have?

A task usually gives a limit, for example a quarter of the original or a fixed number. The accepted margin is often 10 % either side: for 150 words, aim for 135 to 165. Always check the instruction of your own task.

Common mistake

English speakers copy whole sentences, add Je pense que... or keep the first example. Do none of that. Also, un résumé is a summary: the English word *résumé* for a job document is un CV in French.

Un texte de 600 mots

600 mots → résumé au quart → 150 mots

Marge de 10 % : de 135 à 165 mots

Pas de je, pas d'exemple, pas de citation

Calculating the limit before writing.

Culture note

The contraction de texte is a classic school task in France: students shrink a text to about a quarter or a third of its length, with a margin of 10 %.

Zoé's tip

After each paragraph, close the page and say its idea aloud in one sentence. If you cannot, you have not understood it yet. Write only what you said.

Key points to remember

- A summary uses the present tense and the third person: L'auteur explique que....
- Five tools shorten a text: noun phrases, general terms, adjectives, clauses to phrases, merged sentences.
- Connectors such as cependant and par conséquent keep the logic of the original.
- The usual margin is 10 % either side of the target length.
- Un résumé is a summary; a résumé for a job is un CV.

Summarizing a long text with precision: frequently asked questions

How long should a summary be?

It depends on the task. A quarter or a third of the original is common, with a margin of 10 %. Read the instruction and count your words.

Can I quote the text in a summary?

No. Rephrase every idea in your own words. Short key terms from the text are fine, but whole sentences are not.

Which tense should I use?

Use the present tense and the third person: L'auteur explique..., Le texte montre.... Do not write je or give your opinion.

How do I find the keywords?

Underline the nouns and verbs that carry the main idea of each paragraph. Skip examples, figures that only illustrate and repeated ideas.

What is the difference between a summary and a synthesis?

A summary condenses one text. A synthesis compares and organizes several documents around one question, with its own plan.