**Summarizing Journal Articles**

**Post-Class Activities**

These post-class activities provide you with some refresher questions that focus on the skills needed to write effective summaries before giving you more practice in summarizing jargon-heavy articles effectively. Lastly, you will be asked to provide a final, improved summary of the journal article that you worked on in the pre-class activities, and which you received feedback on in the in-class activity session.

**Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4 (1 mark each, 4 marks total)**

For each of the following questions, read the statement related to writing a summary of a journal article, and answer either ‘**True**’ or ‘**False**’ (if all or part of it is false).

**Q1:** When summarizing a research article, you should quote directly from it.

**Q2:** When summarizing a research article, you should never include the specific numerical details of the main results (e.g. the statistical results).

**Q3:** When summarizing a research article, you will probably need to use a lot of jargon.

**Q4:** When summarizing a research article, you should only try to summarize the single most important result.

**Question 5 (8 marks)**

Read the journal article below. You may need to log in to your institution’s library when prompted. Alternatively, you can access them yourself using the Google Scholar search function; typing in the article title alone (**bolded** below) will bring up a link.

**Canyon wrens alter their songs in response to territorial challenges** (Benedict, L, Rose, A, Warning, N. (2012).)

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0003347212004198>

Recall that when you summarize an article, your goal should be to answer the following six questions succinctly, and in your own words:

**1: What problem/question does this research consider?**

**2: Why is this problem/question important/interesting?**

**3: What did the researchers predict?**

**4: What methods were used (in general)?**

**5: What were the main findings?**

**6: What evidence is provided to support the main findings?**

First, try to summarize the article by answering these six questions (1 mark each, 6 marks total). Then, paste all your answers together into one long summary and edit this to make it more succinct and interesting to read. As a test, try to do this in less than 150 words (2 marks). *Hint: When editing your answers to the six questions into one summary, you should be able to incorporate more than two answers into some sentences.*

**Question 6 (6 marks)**

So far, you have spent most of your time focusing on the translation of content from a journal article. Now you will focus a little more on style. Both elements must be handled carefully to ensure that your summary is as good as it can be.

The paragraph of text below is a published summary taken from a research thesis. Although it scores quite highly in terms of content (the reasons for the research, the main findings, and the recommendations are explained in detail), there are a number of areas that could be improved in terms of style (especially for a more general audience). Two of these are in the transitions between sentences, and the jargon used throughout.

Your task is to copy and paste the abstract before re-writing parts of it to improve the transitions (3 marks) and minimize the jargon (3 marks). Try to make **at least three** changes to components that come under each of these categories. **Be sure to bold all changes so they are easy to see**.

*Introduced plant species exert major influences on the structure and function of ecosystems, and are often implicated in biodiversity declines. The Eurasian annual cheatgrass, Bromus tectorum, has spread extensively in western North America since its introduction over 150 years ago; it extirpates native species, appears to have increased fire cycle periodicities, and provides cattle with inadequate nutrition. Because cheatgrass abundance recently increased in pastures of grassland in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia, Canada, assessing environmental and biotic factors that influence its abundance is important from a management perspective. In an observational study at five heterogeneous sites, I isolated a number of highly significant correlations; cheatgrass abundance was positively correlated with proximity to focal ponderosa pine (Pinus ponderosa) trees, but negatively correlated with other plant diversity. Also, soil pH and soil moisture were significantly lower in proximity to trees than at distances further away, suggesting soil chemistry could have affected cheatgrass abundance. Because other analyses indicated that cheatgrass abundance differed in relation to the identity of the other species present, I conducted community-wide and species-specific co-occurrence analyses; I asked whether invaded communities featured different assembly patterns and isolated the species that had the strongest co-occurrence patterns with cheatgrass. I found that communities lacking cheatgrass were more diverse in terms of grass species and appeared to be structured non-randomly. Invaded communities, however, displayed patterns indicative of ‘disassembly’ as co-occurrence relationships did not differ from null predictions. Five grass species grew relatively more frequently if cheatgrass was present; these were bluebunch wheatgrass (Pseudoroegnaria spicata), Kentucky bluegrass (Poa pratensis), western needlegrass (Stipa occidentalis), sand dropseed (Sporobolus cryptandrus) and needle-and-thread-grass (Stipa comata). These results suggest that selective herbicide use in proximity to pine trees could be effective in controlling cheatgrass in these grasslands. I recommend manipulative experiments to assess the potential of this technique, as well as seeding experiments designed to characterize the most effective natural competitors against cheatgrass.*

**Question 7 (7 marks)**

Copy and paste the summary of the journal article that you wrote in the pre-class activities (the original version, before you worked on it in the in-class activities). **You will need to do this before showing an improved version to give yourself the chance to obtain full marks; without both versions it is impossible to know how you have improved the original summary. Be sure to label each summary so that it is clear which one was your original version.**

Then write in the feedback that you received from your partner(s) (2 marks, this can be in bullet point form), and note how you have edited your summary to improve it based on this feedback (2 marks, this can also be in bullet point form). Then write your improved summary with the main changes in **bold** to make it easy to see how it has improved from your original version (3 marks).

*Note: If for some reason you missed the in-class activities, or did not receive feedback from a partner on your original summary, you can still achieve full marks for this question. Instead of writing in the feedback received from your partner(s), write in things that you feel could be improved, before stating how you have edited your summary to reflect these. Make sure you also write your new version of the original summary. If you did not complete the pre-class activities and do not have an original summary to work from, you can still receive 3 marks for a well-written summary of your research article.*