**Summarizing Journal Articles**

**Pre-Class Activities**

Summarizing information is one of the most important skills to learn. Turning complex material into a form that makes it more readable for others requires similar skills to paraphrasing and using quotations effectively. However, there are some subtle but very important differences. These pre-class activities have been designed to give you practice in distinguishing these, as well as ensuring you write a summary of a recent peer-reviewed journal article that interests you. You must bring your summary and the journal article to the in-class activities for this writing skills unit.

You may have already learned how to paraphrase material from its source by making it more concise and putting it into your own words. When writing a summary, you should do exactly the same thing, except you should make it considerably shorter than its original form and focus only on the **very important** information. When you work with scientific journal articles, it can be initially difficult to distinguish which pieces of information are very important from those that are less important, because every article contains so much information. These activities should help you develop strategies for making this distinction.

**The Key Elements**

Every journal article is different, but as a general guide, you should read each one and make notes with the following questions in mind:

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?

**Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 (2 marks each, 12 marks total)**

For each of the following six questions, you will need to refer to a modified **abstract** that appears below (it is deliberately not written concisely). When you summarize an article, it is important that you read the whole article (and not just the abstract), but for this exercise, a smaller body of text will be sufficient. As you read it, try to think about what the really important information is.

***In the ability and motivation to copy others, social learning has been shown to provide a mechanism for the inheritance of behavioural traditions, yet major questions remain about the circumstances and models that shape such social learning. Here, we tested the hypothesis that young monkeys would learn feeding techniques by watching other monkeys of indiscriminate descent eat these foods. Contrary to expectations, our results demonstrate that behavioural food-processing variants among wild vervet monkey, Chlorocebus aethiops, infants solely followed their mothers’ examples in their embryonic manipulative approaches to a new foraging problem. In our field experiment, grapes covered with sand were provisioned within groups of wild vervet monkeys that included experienced adults and 17 naïve infants. Monkeys dealt with the dirty food in four different ways but all infants first adopted their mother's way of handling the grapes, rather than those of other mothers or other monkeys eating nearby (χ*²*=18.41, p=<0.001), and mothers who handled grapes in different ways had infants who were more likely to explore different approaches to handle the sandy grapes. Our findings suggest a capacity for detailed copying by infants of their mothers' and matriline members' food-processing techniques when encountering new foods, underlining the significance of familial models in such primate social groups.***

Now, for the following six questions, copy and paste the complete sentence in the abstract that **contains** the answer (1 mark). Then, try to summarize this information for each question by writing it in your own words. Write it more concisely and useless specific detail (1 mark). *Hint: Think hard about whether you need specific information to provide an accurate summary answer to each question and* ***do not*** *include it if it is unnecessary.*

**\* As you work through questions 1 - 6, keep a copy of your answers in another file. You will need to paste the combined answers into a summary for Question 7. \***

**Q1:** **What problem/question does this research consider?**

**Q2: Why is this problem/question important/interesting?**

**Q3: What did the researchers predict?**

**Q4: What methods were used (in general)?**

**Q5: What were the main findings?**

**Q6: What evidence is provided to support the main findings?**

**Question 7 (4 marks)**

Imagine that you have summarized 10 papers in the same way as you have just done for the fictional abstract above, and that you now want to summarize everything into one piece of writing. This will mean summarizing everything again, which means removing any information from each one that is not vital or very interesting.

Copy and paste all of your answers to questions 1 – 6 together to form one summary paragraph. When you read it, this might seem as though you have paraphrased rather than summarized the material. To rectify this, re-write your summary more succinctly to remove any redundant or uninteresting information (2 marks), and to make sure it transitions more smoothly from sentence to sentence (2 marks). *Hint: You might wish to re-order the sentences to make the summary more interesting, and/or remove any lingering specifics that are not needed to get the important messages across, as well as adding a sentence at the end to state the wider implications of the study and its findings.*

**Question 8 (4 marks)**

Try to summarize a recent peer-reviewed journal article that interests you (this can be from any scientific discipline). In your summary, try to answer the six questions that appear in the ‘key elements’ section (above). Most importantly, try to write no more than 250 words, but do not worry too much about style just now. Although the content is very important, you will not be graded on this aspect yet.

\* When you have completed your summary, copy and paste it and include a word count. **Make sure you also save a copy for yourself. You will need to (1) print this, along with (2) a copy of the peer-reviewed journal article you used, and bring them both with you to participate in the in-class activities.** In these activities, you will work with a partner to improve your summaries in terms of content and style. \*