**Summarizing Journal Articles**

**In-Class Activities**

These in-class activities will build on those you completed in the pre-class set; you will gain practice in deciding what makes certain pieces of specific information worthy of inclusion in summaries (or not), before turning your attention to improving (in a more general sense) the summary of a journal article that you wrote in the pre-class activities.

**Activity 1 (work together, 10 minutes)**

Recall that when you summarize a journal article (or any scientific document), you should only focus on reporting the really important information. However, it can be hard to know when to incorporate specifics into a summary. Although it is easy to rephrase jargon into words that any audience will understand, it can be hard to know when you should include statistics, dates, or measures etc. As a general guide, when deciding whether to include such specific information, ask yourself two questions:

**Would leaving this information out…**

1. Lead to a **biased** interpretation of the original article?
2. Make it **hard** for readers to understand what the original article showed?

If you are preparing your summary for a general audience and the answer to these questions is ‘**no**’, then you should leave out the specific information.

To get some practice in deciding whether to include specifics, read the following three sentences below (all taken from a fictional journal article). The specifics in question are **bolded** for you. Your task is to decide whether to include them (Yes/No), before re-writing the sentences in your own words to summarize the content succinctly.

**Sentence 1:** We used **Michaelson XF-550** outdoor aviary cages to house the parrots that we used in our voice recognition study.

**Sentence 2:** We devised three treatment groups to allow us to compare recognition success rate under different circumstances: one included parrots (**n=310**) exposed to their owners’ voices every day, one included parrots (**n=17**) exposed to unfamiliar voices every day, and one included parrots (**n=308**) that were not exposed to any voices.

**Sentence 3:** We found that parrots exposed to their owners’ voices every day were significantly more successful at recognizing their owners’ in crowded rooms (**Tukey’s HSD = 34.71, p = 0.02**) than in either of the other groups, which did not differ significantly (**Tukey’s** **HSD = 1.71, p = 0.42**).

**\* Please note there will be a brief class discussion about the sentences above before you move on to Activity 2 \***

**Activity 2 (work together, 5 minutes)**

Find a partner, or work in a group of three so that nobody is left alone, but work with people outside your own project group. Take out the summary of the journal article that you wrote in the pre-class activities, and the article on which it is based. Tell your partner(s) about your article and the important parts in it. You can refer to your summary, but try not to read it yet; just attempt to explain verbally what the research involved, why it was interesting, and what the main findings were. Then mention some of the other information that was relatively interesting but that you did not include, before trying to justify to your partner(s) why it was not worth including in your summary.

**Activity 3 (work together, 15 minutes)**

Swap your summary with your partner and show them the related article so that they can refer to it if they want when reading through your summary. Your task is to provide constructive feedback on the summary that you are given (they will use this later to improve it). You should comment on the content and the style.

In terms of content, remember to pay attention to the six important questions that apply to summaries and ask whether these have been addressed:

**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?**

In terms of style, try to recall all of the things you have learned in these writing skills classes and look out for any associated errors. *Hint: Do the sentences transition smoothly, are units, numbers and abbreviations in the correct form, are the active and passive voices used appropriately, are the mechanics of the grammar applied effectively, is everything written as concisely and interestingly as possible, and are linked elements in parallel form?*

**Activity 4 (work together 10 minutes)**

Use the constructive feedback you receive from your partner(s) to try to improve the quality of your summary. If you run out of time, do not worry; a very similar activity will be included as a graded question in the post-class activities so that you can show how you have improved your summary after receiving feedback from your partner(s).