

Basics

We often listen to someone and then use the information we heard, or pass it on to someone else. When we do these things, we don't usually repeat what was said word for word, but rather make a summary including the most important information.

The academic context

Being able to listen to a lesson, a lecture or a discussion and extract the most important information from it is a key skill in any academic situation. A good summary can be used when studying for examinations or to produce your own work.

Key features

In order to produce a good summary, you have to:

- Identify the main purpose of the text. Why is the speaker communicating? (See **Listen for gist**.)
- Understand the main ideas and the connections between them.
- Make notes of the most important information. It's not about writing as much as you can: in fact, the less you write, the more you can focus on listening.
- Use abbreviations, symbols, etc. in your notes consistently so that you can understand them later. Bullet points can be useful, but they don't indicate the connections between ideas. Mind maps can be more efficient.
- Write notes that are clear enough for you to understand later. Depending on when you write the summary, you might not remember much. Check your notes at the end: if you showed them to someone who didn't listen, would they be able to understand them?

Challenges / difficulties

It's impossible to write every single thing that is said in a lecture or class discussion. Knowing which information to note down is often a major difficulty when preparing a summary.

How can I develop this skill?

The Worksheet will give you some guidance. Beyond that, you need to keep practising as much as possible!

Learning outcome

Extracting the most important information in order to prepare a summary will help you keep relevant records of your studies, which will be extremely useful when writing your own work or revising for exams.

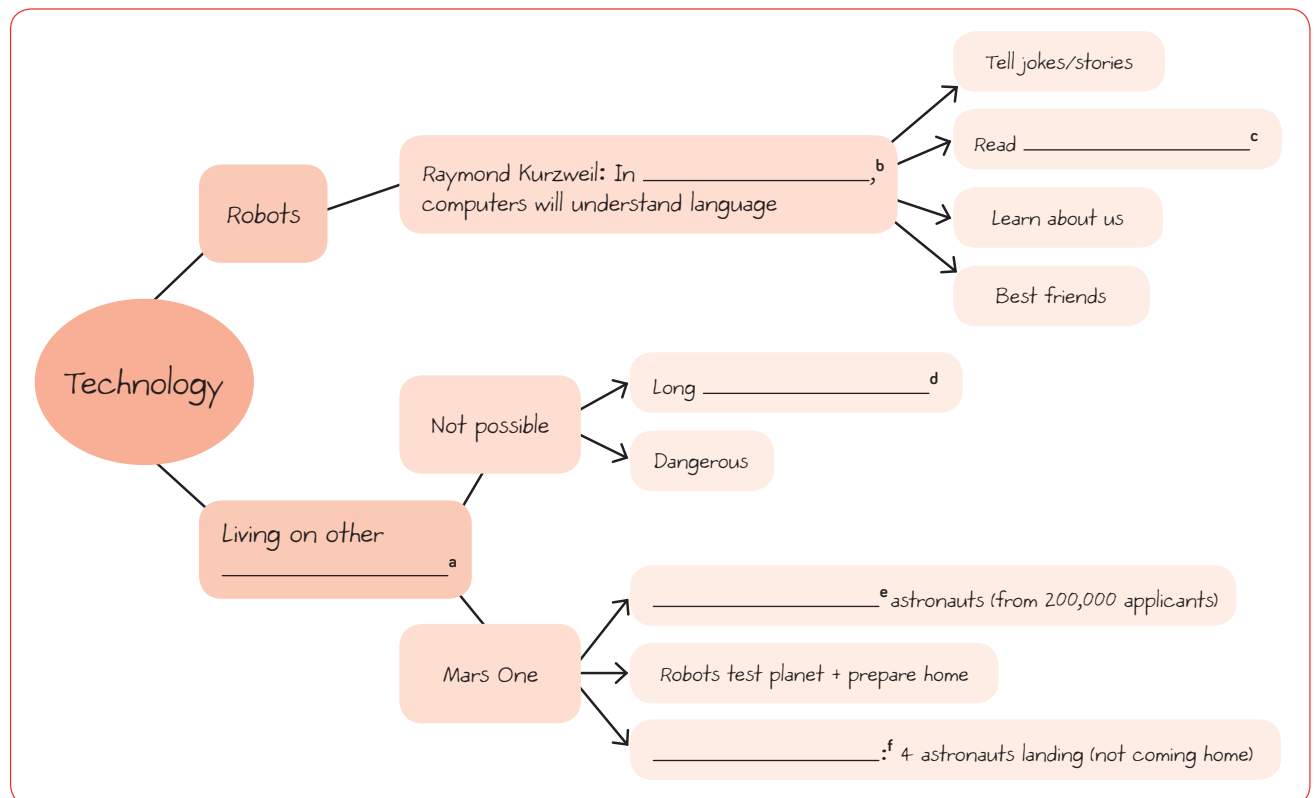
Theory to practice

- 1** Read the transcript of a programme about the future and complete the notes below with one word or number in each gap.

This week we are looking at technology and how it will change the way we live. First, we're going to look at robots, and then we'll look at the possibility of living on another planet and the role robots might play.

So first, robots. Robots are basically computers that act like human beings. They are already quite clever, and one man thinks that one day these robots will be cleverer than humans. Raymond Kurzweil is a director at Google, and he says that by 2029, computers will understand language. They will make jokes and tell stories better than we can. They will read all our emails and everything we type. Then they will use this information to learn about us and the way we think. Kurzweil says these computers will know the answer to your question before you've asked it. But will these robots be safe? Some people are frightened about having very clever robots. But Kurzweil isn't worried. He says the robots won't be dangerous. They will be our best friends.

So what about living on another planet? And how will robots help? For many years, humans have dreamt of going to Mars. But it's not been possible for a number of reasons. Firstly, it's a very long journey. Experts predict it will take about seven months. And of course, the planet could be dangerous. Some people think the red sand that covers Mars is poisonous to humans. But now, a project called Mars One plans to send 24 astronauts to live there. When Mars One advertised the project, over 200,000 people applied to be the first astronauts. But how will they survive? First, Mars One will send robots to test the planet and make sure it is safe. Then the robots will prepare a home for the astronauts with shelter, food and water. Finally, in 2027, the four astronauts will land on Mars and start their new life. But the astronauts have made a very big decision. Because the big news about this trip is this: the astronauts won't be able to come home.



2 Compare notes with a partner. Would these notes be enough to write a summary, even if you hadn't read the transcript?

Ways to get more practice

Choose a video on the internet, and make notes while watching. Watch it again or read the transcript (if there is one) to see if you left out any important information. You can do the same in class, recording your teacher (with their permission) to listen again later.