

# Crime Rates: Rising or Falling?



## Warm Up

In the previous units, we learned techniques for explaining the content of charts and graphs. In academic research, however, we more often need to read articles written in English. Therefore, practicing how to **summarize** texts and **paraphrase** or **rewrite** them in our own words is essential foundational training. Such practice not only helps prevent plagiarism but also enables us to synthesize information effectively and present it clearly and concisely in both spoken and written reports.

In Unit 6, we will learn to:

- Master the steps and techniques involved in summarizing the content of a text;
- Explain the content of a text in one's own words;
- Synthesize textual and visual information to develop one's own argument.

# Useful Strategies and Language

## 1 Context

The theme of this month's discussion on a student online forum is **crime rates**. The forum website has posted a questionnaire survey targeting university students, and the chart below shows students' perceptions of the increasingly rising crime rates.



*Figure 1* Percentage of students who believe there is more crime now than in previous years (based on a survey of 750 students)

The following is a short commentary written by Mike, a sociology major, expressing his views on the chart above.



*Mike, 3rd Year Sociology*

This graph shows that most people have the perception that the rate of crime in society is rising year after year. However, we cannot assume that this reflects the true state of affairs. The reasons for this are explained as follows.

Imagine that you see two headlines on a news website. The first is 'Man Steals Wallet in Station.' The second is 'Man Enjoys Great Day.' Like most people, you would probably click on the bad news story.

When asked how they feel about news, most people will claim that the news media are too negative. People say they would prefer to hear and read positive news stories. However, the media know that, in fact, negative news sells. As a consequence, crime forms such a large part of the daily news content.

You might think this is harmless. After all, crime is one of the leading genres of fiction. Watching crime stories in movies or on TV allows people to feel scared in a safe way, according to psychologists. However, the amount of crime featured in the news is out of proportion with the real situation. That explains the phenomenon shown in the graph.

In addition, humans are obsessed with crime. This means we think about small incidents **a lot** and give them more attention than they probably deserve. This is another reason why, when asked about the level of crime in society, we are likely to overestimate it and guess that it is rising **when**, in fact, it is actually falling.



## 2 Steps and Techniques for Summarizing Texts and Visuals

Summary is a way of organizing information from a text. When composing a summary, writers should use wording different from that of the original source to concisely synthesize the main points. It is not necessary to restate all of the content, and no information that is not included in the original text should be added.

In the previous section, we read a chart and a short commentary related to crime rates. Drawing on these sources, we will explain the techniques for summarizing a text, which involve four steps:

- (1) Developing an initial understanding of the text's main idea;
- (2) Extracting key sentences from the text;
- (3) Synthesizing and rewriting the key sentences;
- (4) Writing the summary.

### Step (1): Developing an initial understanding of the text's main idea

Quickly skim the chart and the text, and then write down your initial understanding of the text's main idea, using a few words or a single sentence. Since this is just a first impression, it does not need to be complete. Here is an example: *According to the graph, most students believe that the crime rate is increasing each year. However, Mike disagrees and explains why in his article.*

### Step (2): Extracting key sentences from the text

Read the text carefully, identify the key points related to the main idea noted in Step (1), and extract the relevant key sentences from the text.

Main point	Key sentences
1. Mike's overall response to the graph	“... we cannot assume that this [rising crime rate over the years] reflects the true state of affairs.”
2. First support	“... most people will claim that the news media are too negative ... However, the media know that, in fact, negative news sells.” “As a consequence, crime forms such a large part of the daily news content.”
3. Second support	“In addition, humans are obsessed with crime.” “Watching crime ... allows people to feel scared in a safe way.”
4. Mike's conclusion	“We ... give crime stories more attention than they deserve.” “... we are likely to overestimate it and guess that it is rising when, in fact, it is actually falling.”

### Step (3): Synthesizing and rewriting the key sentences

Synthesize the key sentences identified earlier and rewrite them in your own words. In general, when paraphrasing, use vocabulary different from the original text and vary the sentence structure. However, proper nouns or technical terms may be quoted directly

Main point	Key sentences synthesized and paraphrased
1. Mike's overall response to the graph	The rising crime rate, as indicated in the graph, does not show the real situation.
2. First support	People are generally drawn to negative news, like crime stories. Therefore, the media focus on such stories.
3. Second support	News about crime interests people because it provides them with a safe thrill.
4. Mike's conclusion	As a consequence of the media's focus and people's interest, many people believe crime is increasing, even when it might actually be decreasing.

### Step (4): Writing the summary

Connect the sentences rewritten in Step (3) to form a coherent paragraph, as shown in the example below. This summary is approximately 90 words and its overall structure is as follows:

**Sentence #1:** Summarize the key points of the chart.

**Sentence #2:** Summarize Mike's views on the chart.

**Sentence #3:** Point out that his view is supported by two arguments.

**Sentences #4–6:** Present the two supporting arguments, using “in the first place” for the first and “furthermore” for the second.

**Sentence #7:** Lead into the conclusion with “as a consequence of.”

## Sample Summary

<sup>1</sup>The graph indicates that most students believe the crime rate is increasing each year. <sup>2</sup>The rising crime rate, according to Mike, does not show the real situation. <sup>3</sup>His comments provide two reasons to support his position. <sup>4</sup>In the first place, people are generally drawn to negative news, like crime stories. <sup>5</sup>Therefore, the media focus on such stories. <sup>6</sup>Furthermore, news about crime interests people because it provides them with a safe thrill. <sup>7</sup>As a consequence of the media's focus and people's interest, many people believe crime is increasing, even when it might actually be decreasing.

### 3 Paraphrasing/Rewriting Techniques

#### 1) Synonyms

Paraphrasing or rewriting is an important step in summarizing. One of the most common techniques is to use synonyms. For example, in Table 1, *reflect* (original) can be rewritten as *show* (rewritten), and *the true state of affairs* (original) as *the real situation* (rewritten); in Table 2, *feel scared in a safe way* (original) can be rewritten as *a safe thrill* (rewritten).

	Original text	Rewritten text
Ex. 1	“... we cannot assume that this <b>reflects the true state of affairs</b> .”	The rising crime rate ... does not <b>show the real situation</b> .
Ex. 2	“Watching crime ... allows people to <b>feel scared in a safe way</b> .”	News about crime provides people with <b>a safe thrill</b> .

#### 2) Sentence structure transformation

Another common technique for paraphrasing is to vary the sentence structure, as illustrated in Example 3 with the use of active and passive sentences.

	Original text	Rewritten text
Ex. 3	“... negative news sells.” (an active sentence)	People are generally drawn to negative news. (a passive sentence)

# Speaking Task

## 1 Task Content

Jintan College is expecting to recruit more students to its history department over the next few years. Below are an extract from a letter written by the head of the History Department at Jintan College to the college's president and a graph showing the results of surveys given to students of history at the college over recent years. The information contained in each does not entirely support the other.

### Letter extract (written by the head of the History Department)

*For the upcoming semester, we need to hire more teaching staff to replace members of the faculty who are moving on to other positions elsewhere. In order to meet the needs of our students, I strongly recommend that we focus our recruitment efforts on those who specialize in local history, specifically that of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.*

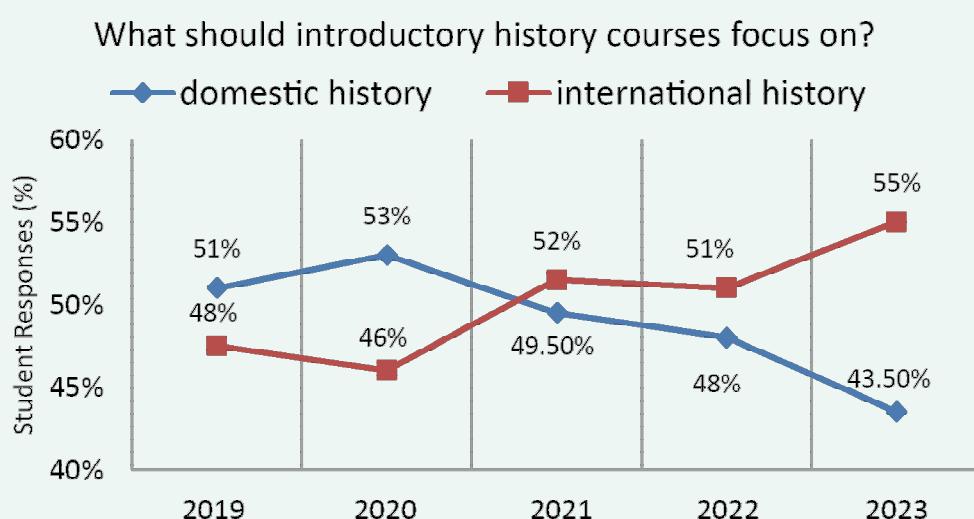


Figure 2 Survey results of history students at Jintan College

## 2

## Task Requirements

You have 2.5 minutes to give your presentation based on the passage and the line graph. You should:

- (1) Discuss the key difference between the letter extract and graph;
- (2) State your own opinion on the topic, comparing the information from the letter and graph with your own experiences.



# Writing Task

Challenge

## 1 Task Content

A newspaper in West House City published the following bar chart to show the number of crimes reported from 2000 to 2023.

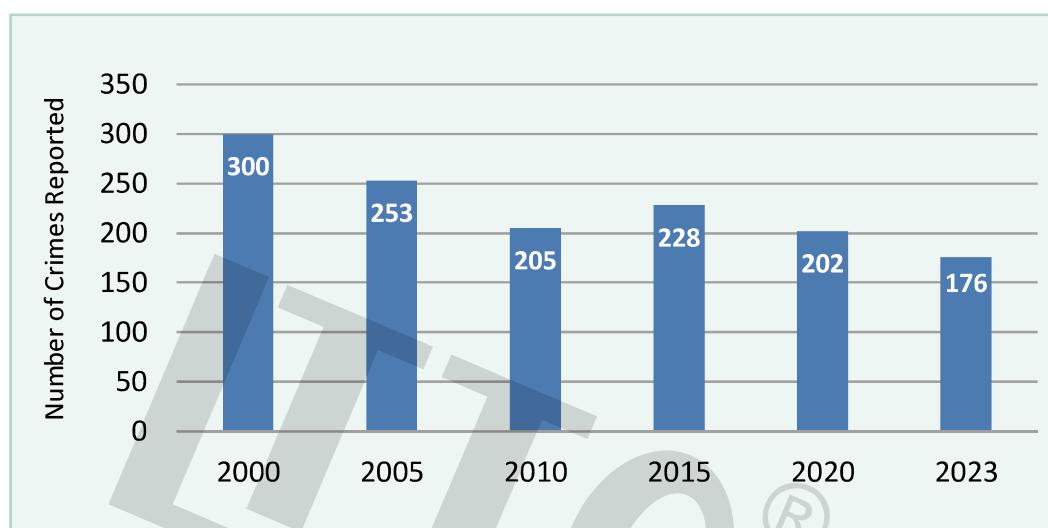


Figure 1 Crimes reported in West House City

Read the following opinion piece that appeared in the local newspaper after the release of the figure above.

### Opinion

February 24, 2024

By Susan Lee

#### Much Crime is Hidden

Official figures show that the crime rate is falling. Unfortunately, this “good news” is not accurate. I will explain why.

These figures only represent the number of crimes recorded by the police. But, in fact, as much as 60% of crime is never even reported. There are a number of explanations for this.

First, some victims of crime feel that contacting the police is pointless. They feel that their problem will not be taken seriously. They worry that

the incident appears trivial to other people despite the psychological or even physical suffering they are experiencing.

Crimes also leave the victims feeling stressed. Unfortunately, these innocent people may not then feel they can cope with even more stress. Therefore, they choose not to go through the official process of reporting what happened to them. This may be especially true if the victims feel their own behavior played some part in what occurred.

Yet other victims feel what took place may be too trivial to bother the police force with. They may see police officers working very hard. Consequently, they may be reluctant to add to the burden by reporting their own problems.

For all of these reasons, much of the crime in society today is actually hidden. We must take action to deal with this because criminals are getting away with their crimes. Furthermore, the seriousness of the problem is obscured. This means that the resources necessary for tackling these issues are not being directed to the appropriate places.

## 2 Task Requirements

Write an essay in which you present your opinions on the topic of **hidden crime**.

Your essay should contain the following elements:

- (1) A summary of the opinion piece;
- (2) Your own opinions on the issue.

Your essay should be 150–180 words in length. An introduction for this essay is provided below. Please continue by completing parts (1) and (2).

*According to official statistics, there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of crimes reported over the past two decades. However, some people believe that the real situation is not quite so clearcut. In this essay, I will provide my opinion on this topic. But first I will summarize the opinion piece that disputes the official figures.*