

HOW TO WRITE A SUMMARY

What is a Summary?

A summary is a brief restatement--in your own words--of the content of a piece of writing. A summary - or précis - is a shorter version of a longer piece of writing. The summary captures all the most important parts of the original, but expresses them in a [much] shorter space.

When you write a summary, remember your purpose. You are demonstrating that you fully understand a passage that you have read. A good summary is brief, complete, and objective. Find the author's main idea and subordinating ideas and show your clear understanding of the structure.

Why Write a Summary?

- ❑ To help you understand the text and see its strengths and weaknesses.
- ❑ To teach you how to take notes while doing research papers.
- ❑ To help you find key points/ideas so that you can more easily answer essay questions on tests.
- ❑ To help you condense and present long stretches of information from a textbook or lecture.

How Do I Plan for a Summary?

In the planning stage of writing, a writer gathers material and organizes it in hopes of making the drafting stage easier. To plan to write a summary, a writer should:

- Be sure that you understand the piece of writing you are going to summarize.
 - This involves employing all the practices of active reading: previewing, predicting, and questioning.
 - Developing an understanding of the main idea.
 - Being able to understand the main point made in each paragraph.
- Once you understand the reading, you must then take careful notes to insure that you have not missed an important point that the author made.
- Try to state the main idea of the reading in one sentence. Also, try to summarize the point of each paragraph in one sentence.

How do I Write a Summary?

1. Read the passage carefully. Determine its structure. Identify the author's purpose in writing. (This will help you to distinguish between more important and less important information.)

2. Reread, label, and underline. This time divide the passage into sections, either single paragraphs or groups of paragraphs that focus on the same topic. Label, on the passage itself, each section's main point. Underline key ideas and terms.

3. Write one or two sentence summaries, on a separate sheet of paper, of each section. These summaries should state the main idea of each section. Eliminate specific examples, facts, illustrations, and other supporting evidence. The summary should be expressed - as far as possible - in your own words. It's not enough to merely copy out parts of the original.

4. Write a thesis--a one-sentence summary of the entire passage. The thesis should express the central idea of the passage, as you have determined it from the preceding steps. You may find it useful to keep in mind the information contained in the lead sentence or paragraph of most newspaper stories--the *what, who, why, where, when, and how* of the matter. For persuasive passages, summarize in a sentence the author's conclusion. For descriptive passages, indicate the subject of the description and its key features. Note: *In some cases a suitable thesis may already be in the original passage. If so, you may want to quote it directly in your summary.*

5. Write the first draft of your summary by starting with your thesis and combining it with your list of sentence summaries. At this stage, you should include any significant details from the passage. Be sure to eliminate repetition and eliminate less important information. Disregard minor details, or generalize them. Use as few words as possible to convey the main ideas. Write a one or two-sentence account of each section you identify. Focus your attention on the main point. Leave out any illustrative examples.

6. Check your summary against the original passage, and make whatever adjustments are necessary for accuracy and completeness. Make sure the summary captures the main idea of the entire text in your own words.

7. Revise your summary, inserting transitional words and phrases where necessary to ensure coherence. Check for style. Avoid series of short, choppy sentences. Combine sentences for a smooth, logical flow of ideas. Check for grammatical correctness, punctuation, and spelling.

Hints

- The summary should be significantly shorter than the original (a good length for an article of 1000 words might be 200- 250 words).
- Do not include your own opinion in the summary
- Do not rely on quotations from the original passage, and be careful if you paraphrase so that you do not plagiarize (do not follow the author's sentence structure and do not claim his/her ideas or language as your own).
- Write in the present tense (he shows, we work, they allow)
- Introduce the author and title of the work in the opening sentence of your summary.
- Refer to authors in subsequent sentences by their last names only.
- Remember that it must be in your own words. By writing in this way, you help to re-create the meaning of the original in a way which makes sense for you.
- Before you even start, make a note of your source(s). If this is a book, an article, or a journal, write the following information at the head of your notes: *Author, title, publisher, publication date, and edition of book.*