

WRITING A SUMMARY

Writing a good summary requires one to be a good reader. Read the original text, looking for and marking the main ideas. Remember that topic sentences and clincher sentences may help you in this endeavor. Also remember to place in quotation marks any direct quotations you use from the original work.

Guidelines for Writing a Summary

- The summary condenses the main ideas of a text so that its readers will understand the gist of the original work.
- The summary is written in its author's own words, but it very carefully retains the intent, tone, and key ideas of the writer of the original work.
- A summary is typically one-quarter to one-third the length of the original and is written in third person.
- The summary may sometimes quote a particularly effective word or phrase from the original, which should be placed in quotation marks.
- Identify the original work by title and author in the first sentence of the SUMMARY.
- Since it is the summation of another writer's ideas, the SUMMARY should credit the original source by identifying its publication information (author, title, genre, where and when it was published and by whom). This can be done by listing a bibliographic reference for the original work.
- Follow the specific instructions for your assignment.

How to Get Started

(quoted from *A Writer's Resource: A Handbook for Writing and Research*)

- **Write down the text's main point in sentence form**, identifying the text, the writer, what the writer does (reports, explores, analyzes, argues), and the most important point the writer makes about the topic.
- In your own notes **divide the text into sections**, which will be evident according to where the writer uses signal phrases and other means to move from one subtopic to another or from the statement of an idea to the reasons, evidence, and examples that support it.
- **In one or two sentences, sum up what each of the text's sections says**. You're really composing your own topic sentence for each major section of the text.
- **As one of your concluding lines, consider combining your sentence stating the writer's main point (thesis) with the sentences summarizing each of the text's major sections (topic sentences)**. Now you have a first draft of a summary. Read the draft to see if it makes sense. Add, remove, or change parts as needed.

The Objective Summary Vs. The Critical Summary

In *The Writer's Work*, Frank O'Hare distinguishes between the objective summary and the critical summary. Called perhaps by other names, these two purposes behind writing summaries may be an important consideration for your assignment.

The purpose of the objective summary is to condense the main ideas of the original source without offering any opinion or evaluation. In this way, the readers may use the objective information to draw their own conclusions and to form their own opinions.

The purpose of the critical summary is to condense the information contained in the original work as well as to comment on the effectiveness and quality of the original article. It requires the summary writer to evaluate the original work, pass on his or her assessment of it, and support his or her conclusions. This is accomplished in addition to condensing the objective information.

The Purpose of a Summary

Summaries serve many purposes for writers and researchers. Primarily, the summary is a useful way for student writers to learn new information, move new information from short-term to long-term memory, take research notes, or prepare an overview of a topic or article when the audience will not be reading the original work(s) for themselves. The summary, sometimes referred to as an abstract by researchers and scholars, is often included at the beginning of a long article to communicate its core ideas to the audience before they read the entire text. Summaries are also used in writing annotated bibliographies, in which a researcher composes a list of bibliographic citations accompanied by summaries of articles or books on a focused topic.

Sources

Maimon, Elaine P., and Janice H. Peritz. *A Writer's Resource: A Handbook for Writing and Research*. McGraw Hill, 2003.

O'Hare, Frank, and Dean Memering. *The Writer's Work: A Guide to Effective Composition*. Prentice Hall, 1990.

Example Summary

Author Jaime O'Neill's article, "No Allusions in the Classroom," **emphasizes the communication problem between teachers and students due to the students' lack of basic knowledge.** The author supports this assertion by using a combination of personal experience, evidence obtained from recent polls, other professors' opinions, and the results of an experiment he conducted in his own classroom. The experiment O'Neill conducted was an ungraded eighty-six question "general knowledge" test issued to students on the first day of classes. On this test, "most students answered incorrectly far more often than they answered correctly." Incorrect answers included fallacies such as: "Darwin invented gravity" and "Leningrad was in Jamaica." Compounding the problem, students don't ask questions. This means that their teachers assume they know things that they do not. O'Neill shows the scope of this problem by showing that, according to their teachers, this seems to be a typical problem across the United States. O'Neill feels that common knowledge in a society is essential to communicate. Without this common knowledge, learning is made much more difficult because teacher and student do not have a common body of knowledge from which to draw. The author shows the deterioration of common knowledge through poll results, personal experience, other teachers' opinions, and his own experiment's results.

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Commented [12]: the article's thesis

Commented [13]: example of an attributive phrase

Commented [14]: direct quotation

Commented [15]: one of the points supporting the thesis

Works Cited

O'Neill, Jaime. "No Allusions in the Classroom." *Newsweek*, 23 Sept. 1985.
"Example Summary." *Writing@CSU*. Colorado State University, 1993-2010.