WRITING A SUMMARY

- The SUMMARY condenses the main ideas of an article 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. It is typically one-third the length of the original and is written in first person.
- The SUMMARY may sometimes quote a particularly effective phrase from the original, which should be placed in quotation marks in the summary itself.
- The SUMMARY is a useful way of taking research notes or preparing an overview of a topic or specific article when the audience will not be reading the original work(s) for themselves.
- As the writer of a SUMMARY, you want your readers to come away with the main ideas they would have had upon reading the original work for themselves.
- Since it is the summation of another writer’s ideas, the SUMMARY should credit the original source by identifying its publication information. This can be done by listing a bibliographic reference for the original work.
- Many writers also identify the original work by title and author in the first sentence of the SUMMARY.
- Follow specific instructions for your assignment.

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A SUMMARY

from A Writer’s Resource: A Handbook for Writing and Research

1. **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.
2. 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.
3. **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.
4. **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.
Writing a good summary is often dependent upon your being a good reader. Read the original, 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.

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.

SOURCES

