



HOW TO WRITE A SUMMARY

Adapted from *Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum*,
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What is a Summary?

A summary is a brief restatement--in your own words--of the content of a written work. 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 as well as supporting ideas and show your clear understanding of the structure.

Why Write a Summary?

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

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, outline**. This time divide the passage into sections, either single paragraphs or groups of paragraphs that focus on the same topic. Outline each section's main point, noting key ideas and terms.
3. **Write summaries of one or two sentences**, on a separate sheet of paper, for each section. These summaries should state the main idea of each section. Eliminate specific examples, facts, illustrations, and other supporting evidence.

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.

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. (James Joyce→Joyce)

