

Johnson County Community College

Writing Center

SUMMARY

A summary is a condensed piece of writing. The summary should be accurate and complete along with its brevity. It is not a paraphrase of a writing. It is not saying in simpler words exactly what the original says. A summary should not give your opinion. There should be few details, examples, or illustrations. Unnecessary words are eliminated to supply the shortest possible version of the original longer writing.

To write a summary one must do the following:

1. Read the assigned selection very carefully. Be sure that the main idea is thoroughly understood.
2. Make sure you have not misconstrued the author's meaning. Include all major ideas.
3. Take notes while reading.
 - a. Try to annotate most paragraphs.
 - b. Eliminate any notes not significant to the main point.
 - c. Avoid underlining too much material.
4. In a short sentence state the main idea. Do not include any comments or opinions.
5. Revise making sure the writing is accurate, to the point, and in the same sequence as the original.
6. Reread and revise.
 - a. Change clauses to short phrases.

- b. Change clauses and phrases to single words.

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RESPONSE:/REACTION

A response to any reading will be based on the reader's experience, knowledge, and interpretation. The response may be an evaluation of form and/or content. It may be a personal application of the ideas to one's life. It may be an analysis of the possible effects that the article might have on readers within and outside of the field. Are the ideas new, controversial? Regardless, the points made should be coherent and supported with concrete examples from the reading.

The Summary: Keys to Success

- Read with a pencil in your hand.
- Try to annotate (mark or comment) most paragraphs.
- Avoid underlining too much material.
- Ask TWO questions as you read:
 1. What is the author saying?
 2. How is the writer saying it?

The Summary: Characteristics

- Completely objective--no opinions.
- Covers main ideas and supports the text.
- Often only 10-20% the length of the original.
- No commentary or characterization by the summary writer.

The Summary: Overcoming Problems

- Form-

Begin the summary with a sentence that includes the genre (article, book, essay, short story, play, movie, etc.), the title, the author, and the topic or focus (thesis). Keep the order the same as the text.
- Detail-

Be selective when choosing examples to support the major points. Do not include too much detail. Use one example to represent several.
- Flow-

Use transitions to help the reader follow the sequence of facts, such as *first, second, then, next, while, at the same time, meanwhile, during, before, finally, furthermore, in addition to, consequently, another, also, and too.*
- Objectivity-

Keep the summary and your response separate so that the reader will understand what is part of the article and what is your reaction to the article.

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USING REPORTER'S QUESTIONS FOR SUMMARY AND RESPONSE

The Summary: How would the author(s) of this reading answer these questions?

- What is the reading about? What is the problem? What are its causes?
- What are its effects? What is the solution?
- Whom does it affect? Who is concerned? Who is at fault?
- Where does the problem occur? What areas are most affected?
- Why is this topic relevant? Why should the reader be concerned or interested?
- Is there any historical background given? When did the problem occur?
- For how long has it been occurring?
- When was this reading published? How current is the information?
- Are sources included and documented?

The Response: How would you, the reader, answer these questions?

- What is your reaction to what you read?
- How do you think it affects you?
- Did you know about this problem?
- Is there any action you could take to help solve the problem?
- Did you have any questions after reading the piece? Did you have trouble understanding any of the terms or information?
- How credible is the reading?
- How does this topic relate to this course?
- Why do you think the publishers included this reading?

Defining the Summary

Summary- A summary is a condensed piece of writing of someone else's writing. It should be accurate and complete along with its brevity. It is not a paraphrase of a piece of writing because it is not saying in simpler words exactly what the original says. It is giving the main information of the original text. It is not giving opinion or evaluation. There should be few details, examples, or illustrations. Unnecessary words should be eliminated.

Different terminology is sometimes used by instructors when they are referring to the summary. Often, this terminology reflects the discipline in which you are writing. You may encounter some terms which are forms of summaries. They are defined below.

Précis- A précis is a condensation or brief summary of a piece of writing. It should be accurate and complete along with its brevity. It should be no more than 1/3 of the original.

Annotation- An annotation is a very brief summary of a source you plan to use in your research study. It gives just enough information for you to know the source's focus and viewpoint and how well the source is supported or authenticated.

Abstract-An abstract is a summary that presents an overview of an article or a report. Many journals publish abstracts of all the articles in an issue. The sciences often use abstracts to summarize the problem being studied, the participants in the study, the research methods, results, and conclusions. The abstract, like the summary, should be clear and concise.

Synopsis-A synopsis is a summary of the plot of a novel or short story. Although it may be longer than the précis or abstract, the synopsis is still clearly concise and does not provide description and detail, including character development. The synopsis is a common expository form used in the humanities.

Prospectus- A prospectus is not a summary in its truest sense; however, it is a narrative or overview (summary) of your project. The prospectus includes what you expect to cover in your paper, your research method and manner, your timeline, and your resources (sources).

NOTE: *These brief definitions may help you in understanding the terminology your instructor uses, but you still need to clarify with your instructor how detailed you need to be in your summary. The following strategies will help you to write any of the above summary formats.*