



WRITING CENTER

Summary, Response, and Paraphrase

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When you are using source materials in your writing, all three of these writing activities — **summary**, **response**, and **paraphrase**—may be used. In order to help you understand the differences, these three terms are defined and clarified in this document.

SUMMARY

A **summary** is a condensed piece of writing. The summary should be accurate, complete, and brief. 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; it is totally objective. There should be few details, examples, or illustrations. Unnecessary words are eliminated to supply the shortest possible version of the original longer writing.

DIFFERENT TERMINOLOGY FOR THE SUMMARY

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.

The definitions below will help you to understand the terminology your instructor uses, but you still need to clarify with him or her how detailed you need to be in your summary.

1. **Precis.** A precis is a condensation or brief summary of a piece of writing. It should be accurate, complete, and brief. It should be no more than one-third of the original.
2. **Annotation.** An annotation is a very brief summary of a source you plan to use in your research study. It gives just enough information to know the source’s focus and viewpoint and how well the source is supported or authenticated.
3. **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.
4. **Synopsis.** A synopsis is a summary of the plot of a novel or short story. Although it may be longer than the precis or abstract, the synopsis is concise and does not provide description, detail, or character development. The synopsis is a common expository form used in the humanities.

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

WRITING A SUMMARY

1. Read the assigned selection carefully. Be sure that you thoroughly understand the main idea.
2. 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.
3. Find all major ideas in the original piece of writing.
4. State the main idea in a short sentence. Do not include any comments or opinions.
5. Write one sentence for each main idea.
6. Be selective when choosing examples to support the major points.
7. Revise, making sure the writing is accurate, to the point, and in the same sequence as the original. Do not misconstrue the author's meaning.
8. Reread and revise.
 - a. Begin the summary with a sentence that includes the genre, the title, the author, and the topic of the discussion.
 - b. Change clauses to short phrases.
 - c. Change clauses and phrases to single words.
 - d. Use transitions, such as first, then, next, while, during, another, and also to help the reader follow the sequence of facts.

USE OF REPORTER'S QUESTIONS WHEN WRITING A SUMMARY

1. What is the reading about?
2. What is the problem? What are its causes? What are its effects?
3. What is the solution?
4. Whom does the problem affect? Who is concerned? Who is at fault?
5. Where does the problem occur? What areas are most affected?
6. Is there any historical background given? When did the problem occur?
7. For how long has it been occurring?
8. When was this reading published? How correct is the information?
9. Are sources included and documented?

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RESPONSE

A **response** to any reading will be based on the reader's experience, knowledge, opinions, 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. It may discuss ideas which are controversial. Regardless, the response points made should be coherent and supported with concrete examples from the reading.

USE OF REPORTER'S QUESTIONS WHEN WRITING A RESPONSE

1. What is your reaction to what you read?
2. How do you think it affects you?
3. Did you know about this problem?
4. Is there any action you could take to help solve the problem?
5. Did you have any questions after reading the piece? Did you have trouble understanding any of the terms or information?
6. How credible is the reading?
7. How does this topic relate to this course?
8. Why do you think the publishers included this reading in this collection?

PARAPHRASE

WHEN TO PARAPHRASE

1. For **emphasis**. To emphasize your point or to better emphasize the writer's point.
2. To **simplify**. To take a complex statement and make it more readable.
3. For **clarification**. To change technical words or jargon to more standard terms.
4. To **maintain style**. To keep your style consistent by changing sentence structure or word choice.
5. To **retain length**. To include all details when length is not an issue, as with summarizing.

CAUTIONS ABOUT PARAPHRASING

1. Do not just change the words. Also change sentence structure.
2. Do not add new ideas.
3. Avoid judging the source or adding your own interpretation.
4. Do not exaggerate or misrepresent the source.

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PARAPHRASING STRATEGIES

1. Read the passage several times.
2. Outline the passage.
3. Rearrange the outline.
4. Write the paraphrase from the outline.
5. Compare your paraphrase to the original passage.
6. Write the appropriate citation.

EXAMPLE OF PARAPHRASING

Source Text: "Irish students use more magic than American students in four of the six activities: exam-taking, face-to-face interactions, illness, and dangerous activities. There is also a slight tendency for Americans to use more magic in gambling and sports, although the differences between the two groups are not statistically significant."

Outline, using your own words

1. People attending classes in Ireland are a little more superstitious than their counterparts in the USA.
2. In Ireland students rely on magic to get them through tests, social situations, sickness, and moments of danger.
3. American students apply magic to bring luck to athletic events and to betting.
4. However, both groups are not significantly different.

Rearrange the order of information

1. American students apply magic to bring luck to athletic events and to betting activities.
2. In Ireland students rely on magic to get them through tests, social situation, sickness, and moments of danger.
3. People attending classes in Ireland are a little more superstitious than their counterparts in the USA.
4. However, both groups are not significantly different.

Write the paraphrase

In a report about the place of magic in our lives, the authors questioned American and Irish students. American students apply magic to bring luck to athletic events and to betting activities, while in Ireland students rely on magic to get them through tests, social situations, sickness, and moments of danger. Even though people attending classes in Ireland are a little more superstitious than their American counterparts, they are not significantly different in their ways of using magic (Felson and Gmelch 282).