

Writing a Summary

What is a summary? When you write a summary, you provide a condensed version of another text. You convey the main argument or point of text, along with the supporting items the author uses to sustain that argument/point. A summary is very similar to those book reports we all had to write in grade school!

When will I need to write a summary? You may be asked to write a summary of a text in one of your classes so that your professor can make sure you understood the content assigned. However, many times you will need to summarize texts when doing other types of assignments, such as research papers, analyses, annotated bibliographies, and literature reviews.

How do I write a summary?

- 1. The first and most important task is to make sure you fully understand the text in front of you. If there is any confusion, then your summary may end up being inaccurate. Read through your text a few times to make sure you grasp the main idea and points the author is making. Don't even think about writing the summary at this point; just make sure that you understand the text.
- 2. Once you are certain that you understand the text, write down what you believe to be the author's main point/argument (this should be your own words, not the author's *actual* thesis statement).
- 3. Go back through the text and, if there are no subheadings, divide up the text according to the main points the author makes. Write your own synthesis of these points on another sheet of paper.
- 4. Keep the amount of specific examples, evidence, and data the author includes in the text down to a minimum in your summary. Note only what's necessary to help make the author's points clear.
- 5. Avoid personal opinion or evaluation. Your job is to simply provide an objective, condensed version of the text without any type of judgment.
- 6. Your summary does not need a formal conclusion. Just make sure you have clearly stated the author's main argument and supporting points clearly.
- 7. Read your summary against the original text. Do you feel that your audience will be able to get a solid understanding of the main points of the original text from your summary?

How long should the summary be?

The length really depends on the assignment and the instructor's expectations. For assignments that involve summaries (literature reviews, annotated bibliographies, etc.) the summary may only be a few sentences or a short paragraph. However, if the assignment itself is a summary, then your text may be substantially longer and more detailed.

The following resource was consulted in the design of this handout:

Druker, Phil. "How to Summarize." *Advanced Technical Writing*. 2006. University of Idaho. 1 March 2007. http://www.class.uidaho.edu/adv_tech_wrt/resources/general/how_to_summarize.htm

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