



The Writing Center

Summaries

A summary is a concise and objective abstract or synopsis of a text. It should mention the author and title of the text (and, in the case of an article, the name of the publication in which it appeared). It indicates the topic and main point of the text and then presents in condensed form the highlights (of a narrative) or main supporting points (of an argument). Usually, a summary presents information in the same order as the original text.

Advice for writing summaries:

Read the text carefully.

A good summary depends on a clear understanding of the author's argument and the support he or she offers for it. Consider the author's purpose and audience. Identify the main idea or argument and each supporting point. Be sure you understand how details, examples, and explanations are related to these points.

Break the text down into parts.

When summarizing a short text, condense each paragraph into a single sentence. Arrange your sentences in a paragraph, and revise the paragraph to ensure clarity, avoid repetition, and include transitions. When summarizing a longer text, divide it into sections, each addressing a separate subtopic or supporting point. Condense each section into a sentence or paragraph (depending on the length of your summary), and revise as appropriate to ensure that your summary is coherent.

Use your own words.

Reliance on the author's language is plagiarism. To avoid the temptation to borrow language from the text, write the first draft of your summary *only after* you have read the text in full, and avoid referring to the text as you write.

Avoid value judgments.

A summary should be as neutral as possible, so avoid adjectives like interesting, boring, brilliant, ridiculous, and so on. Try not to evaluate the narrative or argument, unless your professor indicates that you should for the purpose of the assignment.

Limit your focus.

A summary should accurately reflect the original text, so avoid the temptation to add details or interpretation of your own. If it's not in the original, it shouldn't be in your summary.

Don't quote; paraphrase.

Summaries rarely include direct quotations. If you feel a quotation from the text is appropriate, keep it short and provide an accurate citation.

