

SUMMARY WRITING INSTRUCTIONS

A summary paragraph should be organized so that others can understand the source or evaluate your comprehension of it. The following format works well:

a. The introduction (usually one paragraph)--

1. Contains a one-sentence thesis statement that sums up the main point of the source. This thesis statement is not your main point; it is the main point of your source. Usually, though, you have to write this statement rather than quote it from the source text. It is a one-sentence summary of the entire text that your essay summarizes.
2. Also introduces the text to be summarized:
 - (i) Gives the title of the source (following the citation guidelines of whatever style sheet you are using);
 - (ii) Provides the name of the author of the source;
 - (ii) Sometimes also provides pertinent background information about the author of the source or about the text to be summarized.

The introduction should not offer your own opinions or evaluation of the text you are summarizing.

b. The body of a summary essay (one or more paragraphs):

This paraphrases and condenses the original piece. In your summary, be sure that you--

1. Include important data but omit minor points;
2. Include one or more of the author's examples or illustrations (these will bring your summary to life);
3. Do not include your own ideas, illustrations, metaphors, or interpretations. Look upon yourself as a summarizing machine; you are simply repeating what the source text says, in fewer words and in your own words. But the fact that you are using your own words does not mean that you are including your own ideas.

c. There is customarily no conclusion to a summary essay.

When you have summarized the source text, your summary essay is finished. Do not add your own concluding paragraph unless instructed.

Drew University on-line resources for writers, 1999.

Writing A Summary

1. **Write in a direct, objective style, using your own words.** Use few, if any, direct quotations, probably none in a one-paragraph summary.
2. **Begin with a reference to the writer (full name), year published, and the title of the work. Then state the writer's thesis.**
3. **Complete the summary by providing other key ideas.** Show the reader how the main ideas connect and relate to one another.
4. **Do not include specific examples, illustrations, or background sections.**
5. **Combine main ideas into fewer sentences than were used in the original.**

6. **Keep the parts of your summary in the same balance as you find in the original.** If the author devotes about 30 percent of the essay to one idea, that idea should get about 30 percent of your summary.
7. **Select precise, accurate verbs to show the author's relationship to ideas.** Write "Jones argues," "Jones asserts," "Jones believes." Do not use vague verbs that provide only a list of disconnected ideas. Do not write "Jones talks about," "Jones goes on to say," or "the article . . ."
8. **Do not make any judgments about the writer's style or ideas.** Do not include your personal reaction to the work.

(Floyd, J.; Whitehead, J.W.; Howe, J., 2011, *Argument!: America in the age of Obama*, p. 25)

LOOKING AT YOUR PEER'S SUMMARY

Read the summary carefully and answer the following questions:

- What do you like best about your peer's summary? (Why? How might he or she do more of it?)
- Is it clear what is being summarized? (i.e.: Did your peer list the source, and cite it correctly?)
- Is the thesis of the original essay clear in the summary? (Write out what you think that thesis is.)
- If you have read the original source, did you identify the same thesis? (If not, how does it differ?)
- Did your peer miss any key points from his or her summary? (If so, what are they?)
- Did your peer include any of his own opinions in his or her summary? (If so, what are they?)
- Did your peer include any unimportant details in his or her summary? (If so, what are they?)
- Where there any points in the summary where you were lost because a transition was missing? (If so, where and how might it be fixed?)
- Where there any points where you were lost because some information seems to have been omitted? (If so, where, and what seems to be missing? Why do you think it might be important?)

Drew University on-line resources for writers, 1999.