

# The Writing Lab

## Summaries (2)

*Handout courtesy of Sue Kuykendall*

There are several different kinds of summaries, and you must know which kind your professor is asking you to write. You may be asked to write any of the following, or a combination of these types of summaries. Probably the most common type of summary assignment is a combination of review-report and application.

- **Review/Report**—to show understanding of what you've read
- **Application**—to show understanding of a principle/theory that you've studied and to show your ability to apply it to real situations
- **Critical**—to place the writing in a larger context or to compare it to another writer's position
- **Evaluative**—to evaluate the writer's ideas and/or writing style
- **Opinion/Response**—to give your own opinions on or responses to the author's ideas.

Remember that a summary should begin with a concise statement of the main point of the source. It then tells the main sub-points in the source. It does *not* give all the supporting details; it only gives sufficient information for a reader to understand the author's ideas.

You must not plagiarize any phrases in the article; instead, paraphrase the author's ideas. A short summary usually should include only one or maybe two quotations from the source. Effective paraphrasing shows that you have fully understood the author's ideas, so if you quote too much, it is obvious that you did not really understand what you read.

A summary should be double-spaced, with the source typed at the bottom of the page in the format that your professor has asked you to use.

The following process will help you understand the source properly and avoid plagiarizing it:

1. Read the article first to get a basic understanding of the author's ideas. Don't mark on the paper during the first reading, and don't use a dictionary; trust yourself to understand more as you read.
2. Now go back and read the article again, making sure that you understand all the ideas. This time, look up vocabulary that you don't know. Mark the sub-points in one color and the sub-sub-points in another color. Your summary should include the ideas which you've marked as sub-points, but not those which you've marked as sub-sub-points.
3. Next, take very brief notes on the article, perhaps in your first language to avoid copying.
4. Then hide the article from yourself and write your summary from your notes. If you look at the article while you're writing your summary, you will almost certainly copy phrases (or your mind will go blank and you won't be able to think of any other way to express the ideas).
5. Finally, check your summary against the article to make sure the summary is accurate and to make sure you haven't accidentally copied any phrases. Make any necessary corrections.

## Summary Guidelines

Following are basic guidelines for writing summaries. #7 applies only to review/report summaries.

1. Have a general statement of the author's main idea at the opening of a summary.
2. Begin a summary by giving the author's name and the article's title, in a sentence that also tells the main idea of the article. This sentence is like a thesis for the summary. If the article is informative, use a verb like "reports" or "tells"; if it's an opinion article, use "argues" or another similar word. For example:

In "Action #3: Buy Less Stuff," Ellis Jones, Ross Haenfler, and Brett Johnson argue that . . .

Use *italics* for the titles of magazines, journals, newspapers, books, websites, and movies. Put quotation marks around the titles of articles (including web pages). Capitalize the first and last words in a title; capitalize the first and last words in a subtitle. Capitalize all other words in a title except articles (a, an, the), prepositions, conjunctions, and the "to" in infinitives.

Give the author's name *exactly* as it is printed. The first time you mention the author's name, give the full name. After the first mention, refer to the author by last name only; don't use social titles (Mr., Miss, or Ms.). If the author has a professional title (Dr.), you may use that.

3. If you quote from the article, you must use quotation marks; if you don't, that's plagiarism, which is a very serious academic offense. If you're using a paper source or a PDF file, put the page number of the quote in parentheses at the end of the sentence. Always introduce quotes:

According to Jones, Haenfler, and Johnson, you can save resources if you "Check out books, movies, and CDs from your local library" (12).

4. Don't quote too much. If you quote too much, it looks like you didn't understand the ideas in the article. Instead, paraphrase: Put the author's ideas in your own words. If you paraphrase, do not use quotation marks.
5. Cover all the major sub-points in the article. Your first job in summarizing is to decide what the article's main point is (put that in the first sentence), then what the major sub-points are. You can change the author's order of presentation if doing that helps you to represent the whole discussion.
6. Don't give the details. Just give enough explanation that somebody could understand the author's ideas from reading your summary.
7. For a report-style summary, don't add opinions or examples.
8. Use present tense to talk about the author's statements—Smith says, Smith adds. Always use present tense for writing about anything that is recorded, whether on paper or on the web.