



The Writing Center @ JSCC

Writing Summaries

The goal of writing a summary of an article, a chapter, or a book is to offer as accurately as possible the full sense of the original, but in a more condensed form. A summary restates the author's main point, purpose, intent, and supporting details in your own words.

The process of summarizing enables you to better understand the original, and the result shows the reader that you understand it as well. In addition, the knowledge gained allows you to better analyze and critique the original. The process of summarizing is straight-forward:

1. First, try to find the main idea in the reading; it's usually in the first paragraph.
2. Next, skim through the article, glancing at any headings and graphics.
3. Then, read the conclusion. The intent here is both to give yourself a review of the work and to effectively engage yourself with it.
4. Now go back and read the original text carefully, jotting down notes on or highlighting the important points. Write the central idea and the author's reasons (purpose and intent) for holding this viewpoint. Note the supporting elements the author uses to explain or back up her/his main information or claim.
5. Make an outline that includes the main idea and the supporting details. Arrange your information in a logical order, for example, most to least important or chronological. Your order need not be the same as that in the original, but keep related supporting points together. The way you organize the outline may serve as a model for how you divide and write the essay.
6. Write the summary, making sure to state the author's name in the first sentence.
 - a. Present the main idea, followed by the supporting points.
 - b. The remainder of your summary should focus on how the author supports, defines, and/or illustrates that main idea. Remember, unless otherwise stated by your instructor, a summary should contain only the author's views, so try to be as objective as possible.

As you revise and edit your summary, compare it to the original and ask yourself questions such as:

- Have I rephrased the author's words without changing his or her meaning?
- Have I restated the main idea and the supporting points accurately and in my own words?

If you are asked to write a critical summary or to include a critique, you may want to ask yourself questions such as:

- Does the author succeed? How and why or why not?
- What are the strengths, weaknesses? Why?
- What did the author do well? Not well? Why?