

How to Write a Summary

Eight Easy Steps

How to Write a Summary in 8 Easy Steps

Writing a good summary demonstrates that you clearly understand a text...and that you can communicate that understanding to your readers.

- A summary can be tricky to write at first because it's tempting to include too much or too little information.
- But by following this easy 8-step method, you will be able to summarize texts quickly and successfully for any class or subject.

1) **Divide...and conquer.**

- First off, skim the text you are going to summarize and divide it into sections.
- Focus on any headings and subheadings.
- Also look at any bold-faced terms and make sure you understand them before you read

2) **Read.**

- Now that you've prepared, go ahead and read the selection.
- Read straight through. At this point, you don't need to stop to look up anything that gives you trouble—just get a feel for the author's tone, style, and main idea.

3) Reread.

- Rereading should be *active* reading.
- Underline topic sentences and key facts.
- Label areas that you want to refer to as you write your summary.
- Also label areas that should be avoided because the details—though they may be interesting—are too specific. Identify areas that you do not understand and try to clarify those points.

4) One sentence at a time.

- You should now have a firm grasp on the text you will be summarizing.
- In steps 1-3, you divided the piece into sections and located the author's main ideas and points.
- Now write down the main idea of each section in one well-developed sentence.
- Make sure that what you include in your sentences are key points, not minor details.

5) Write a thesis statement.

- This is the key to any well-written summary. Review the sentences you wrote in step 4.
- From them, you should be able to create a thesis statement that clearly communicates what the entire text was trying to achieve.

- Sometimes, the central idea of the piece is stated in the introduction or first paragraph, and the supporting ideas of this central idea are presented one by one in the following paragraphs.
- Always read the introductory paragraph thoughtfully and look for a thesis statement. Finding the thesis statement is like finding a key to a locked door.
- Frequently, however, the thesis, or central idea, is implied or suggested. Thus, you will have to work harder to figure out what the author wants readers to understand.
- Use any hints that may shed light on the meaning of the piece: pay attention to the title and any headings and to the opening and closing lines of paragraphs.

6) Ready to write.

- At this point, your first draft is virtually done. You can use the thesis statement as the introductory sentence of your summary, and your other sentences can make up the body.
- Make sure that they are in order. Add some transition words (*then, however, also, moreover*) that help with the overall structure and flow of the summary. And once you are actually putting pen to paper (or fingers to keys!), remember these tips:

Write in the present tense.

Make sure to include the author and title of the work.

Be concise: a summary should not be equal in length to the original text.

If you must use the words of the author, cite them.

Don't put your own opinions, ideas, or interpretations into the summary.

The purpose of writing a summary is to accurately represent what the author wanted to say, not to provide a critique.

7) In writing the summary, let your reader know the piece that you are summarizing. Identify the title, author and source of the piece. You may want to use this formula: In "Title of the Piece" (source and date of piece), author shows that: central idea of the piece. The author supports the main idea by using _____ and showing that

8) Revise. Once you are certain that your summary is accurate, you should (as with any piece of writing) revise it for style, grammar, and punctuation. If you have time, give your summary to someone else to read. This person should be able to understand the main text based on your summary alone. If he or she does not, you may have focused too much on one area of the piece and not enough on the author's main idea.

Remember:

Do not rewrite the original piece.

Keep your summary short.

Use your own wording.

Refer to the central and main ideas of the original piece.

Read with who, what, when, where, why and how questions in mind.

Do not put in your opinion of the issue or topic discussed in the original piece. Often, instructors ask students to put their opinions in a paragraph separate from the summary.

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