

## Summary Writing – A General Overview\*

Summary writing is an essential academic tool for research writing where you present condensed views of others' arguments either to support your view or to provide alternative views to which you respond.

Summary focuses on content AND structure. The following is a process that will lead to effective summarizing:

1. First, read the text quickly. Even if you're confused, read straight through.
2. Read the text again. This time, add "gist statements" in the margins of each paragraph. There are two types of "gist statements" – what the text does / what the text says.

Examples of "what the text does statements:"

- Summarizes the opposition
- Introduces concept x
- Provides a case study as an example
- Presents statistics to support claim

Examples of "what the text says statements" (specific to text):

- Teens' desire for tattoos may be explained as a need to belong
- Another reason teens get tattoos is to build an independent identity

If you have difficulty summing up what a paragraph says, come up with a driving question you think the paragraph is attempting to answer.

3. After going through each paragraph as outlined in step two, try to figure out the structure of the article by dividing it into what you see as the major divisions or parts. Sometimes introductions will indicate those parts, though sometimes they won't.
4. In producing the final summary, the challenge is to convey complex ideas from someone else's text in as few and as clear words as you can. Think of a summary as a budget of words – you only have so many, so choose wisely.

Criteria for an Effective Summary:

1. First, read the text quickly. Even if you're confused, read straight through.
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3. Represent the original article accurately and fairly
4. Be direct and concise, using words economically
5. Remain objective and neutral until you present your own ideas
6. Give the original article balanced and proportional coverage
7. Use your own words
8. Keep the reader informed through attributive tags (according to, as Smith argues...)
9. Quote sparingly or not at all
10. Coherently move from one idea to the next
11. Properly cite (for written pieces)

### **Using Summary in Context – The One-Minute Speech**

With less time and less space allowed, there will be a lot of pressure placed on the aspects you choose to summarize from your technical article/s. Specifically, it will be important to focus on the following aspects as you prepare your short speech:

1. Overall structure – in what order should you present information?
2. Background and context – it is important to indicate where the author is positioned in a broader context. Where does the author's argument fit in the bigger "conversation?" For example,
  - Bob Smith is the only scientist who believes x
  - Bob Smith, as his other environmental counterparts, argues x
  - Bob Smith, unlike most nuclear physicists, sees x as y
3. Topic sentence (clear claim/position) followed by pertinent support. For example, if your position is pro solar power, do not deviate from this topic. You don't have time for asides or peripheral topics.
4. Presentation of significant results. You won't have time to discuss interesting minutia; you must immediately explain the significance of the writer's results.
5. Conclusion with "jumping board possibilities": now that you've presented the author's idea, what are the future implications or problems that still need work?

\* This definition along with the other information in this handout come from *The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing, Fourth Edition*. Eds. John D. Ramage, John C. Bean, and June Johnson. New York: Pearson Education, Inc, 2006.