



Summary Writing

Characteristics of a Good Summary: A good summary has the following characteristics:

- ▶ **Proper Citation:** The summary begins by citing the title, author, source, and, in the case of a magazine or journal article, the date of publication and the text.
- ▶ **Thesis Statement:** The overall thesis of the text selection is the author's central theme. There are several aspects to an effective thesis statement:
 - It comprises two parts: a) the topic or general subject matter of the text, and b) the author's major assertion, comment, or position on the topic.
 - This central theme is summarized clearly and accurately in a one-sentence thesis statement.
 - The thesis statement does not contain specific details discussed in the text.
 - The thesis statement is stated at the beginning of the summary.
- ▶ **Supporting Ideas:** The author supports his/her thesis with supporting ideas. Use the following basic guidelines when summarising supporting ideas:
 - Cover all of the author's major supporting ideas.
 - Show the relationships among these ideas.
 - Omit specifics, such as illustrations, descriptions, and detailed explanations.
 - Indicate the author's purpose in writing: to inform, to persuade, or to entertain. If the passage is a persuasive piece, report the author's bias or position on the issue.
 - Omit all personal opinions, ideas, and inferences. Let the reader know that you are reporting the author's ideas.

- ▶ **Grammar and the Mechanics of Writing:** Grammar and related concerns ensure that, as a writer, you communicate clearly to your reader. The following are particularly important:
 - Restate the ideas in your own words as much as possible. Avoid direct quotations.
 - Use transitional words for a smooth and logical flow of ideas.
 - Edit and re-write your work.
 - Check your grammar, punctuation, and spelling
- ▶ **Length:** The length of a summary depends on how long the original document is.

Steps in Writing a Summary: Initially, summary writing can seem like a challenging task. It requires careful reading and reflective thinking about the article. Most of us, however, tend to skim read without focused reflection, but with time and effort, the steps listed here can help you become an effective summary writer.

▶ Read the article

▶ Reread the Article.

- Divide the article into segments or sections of ideas. Each segment deals with one aspect of the central theme. A segment can comprise one or more paragraphs. Note: news magazine articles tend to begin with an anecdote. This is the writer's lead into the article, but does not contain the thesis or supporting ideas. Typically, a feature lead does not constitute a segment of thought.
- Label each segment. Use a general phrase that captures the subject matter of the segment. Write the label in the margin next to the segment.
- Highlight or underline the main points and key phrases.

▶ Write One-Sentence summaries.

- Write a one-sentence summary for each segment of thought on a separate sheet of paper.

▶ Formulate the Thesis Statement.

- Formulate a central theme that weaves the one-sentence segment-summaries together. This is your thesis statement.

- In many articles, the author will state this directly. You may wish to take his direct statement of the thesis and restate it in your own words. Note: In news magazine articles, the thesis is often suggested through the article's title and sub-title.
- In other articles, you may have to write your own one-sentence thesis statement that summarizes this central theme.

► Write Your First Draft.

- Begin with a proper citation of the title, author, source, and date of publication of the article summarised.
- Combine the thesis statement and your one-sentence segment summaries into a one-to-two-paragraph summary.
- Eliminate all unnecessary words and repetitions.
- Eliminate all personal ideas and inferences.
- Use transitions for a smooth and logical flow of ideas.
- Conclude with a “summing up” sentence by stating what can be learned from reading the article.

► Edit Your Draft. Check your summary by asking the following questions:

- Have I answered the who, what, when, why, and how questions?
- Is my grammar, punctuation, and spelling correct?
- Have I left out my personal views and ideas?
- Does my summary “hang together”? Does it flow when I read it aloud?
- Have someone else read it. Does the summary give them the central ideas of the article?

► Write Your Final Draft.