

Writing Summaries

A **summary** is a shortened version of someone else's writing. Summaries vary in length and amount of details depending on the length of original source, requirements of the instructor, and the purpose of the summary.

All summaries must do the following:

- Be shorter than the original source—between three and ten sentences, depending on the length of the source.
- *Include the **main idea** of the original source in your own words.*
- Include all of the major details in your own words.
- Identify the author and title of article in the first sentence.
- Avoid your opinions, ideas or knowledge.

Questions You Should Ask Your Instructor:

- Should I use direct quotes? Is there a limit on the number of quotes I use?
- Should I include more publication information than the author and title? If so, where should I put that information?
- Should I use in-text citations of the source?

Strategies for Writing Summaries

1. Read the passage carefully. Examine its structure. Identify the author's purpose in writing the article.
2. Reread. Divide the passage into stages of thought. Label each stage of thought and underline key ideas and terms.
3. Write one-sentence summaries of each stage of thought using your own words.
4. Write the thesis (main idea) of the entire passage using your own words. It might be helpful to look carefully at the information in the title and the lead sentence or paragraph. Often, there is a written thesis in the lead paragraph that you can paraphrase.
5. Write the first draft of your summary by 1) combining the thesis you wrote with your list of one-sentence summaries or each stage of thought or 2) combining the thesis with the one-sentence summaries plus significant details from the passage. Be sure to eliminate repetition and less important information. Use as few words as possible to convey your ideas.
6. Check your summary against the article to be sure you have all of the important information.
7. Revise your summary by adding transitional words and phrases to enhance coherence. Avoid short, choppy sentences. Be sure to check for grammar, spelling, and mechanics.