

The Learning Center  
Meredith College

Writing Summaries

A **summary** presents an overview of the main ideas of the source text (the author's ideas). Your own opinions should not be found in a summary.

- Requirements for a good summary:
  - There should be a **balanced** coverage of the original source. (Avoid the tendency to devote more coverage to the earlier parts of the source.)
  - It should present the source material in a **neutral** fashion.
  - It should **condense** the source material and be presented in the summary writer's own words.
- The length of a summary depends on the purpose and length of the original.
- Most summaries begin with a sentence that refers to the source and the main idea.
  - The first sentence of a summary usually acknowledges the source, including the title, the author, and where the article can be found. The thesis/topic sentence also has an initial position.

Steps for writing a summary (particularly of longer sources):

1. Skim the text, noting in your mind the subheadings. If there are no subheadings, try to divide the text into sections.
2. Read the text, highlighting important information and/or taking notes.
3. In your **own** words, write down the main points of each section. Try to write a one-sentence summary of each section.
4. Write down the key support points for the main topic, but do not include minor details.
5. Go through the process again, making changes as appropriate.

Hints on summarizing:

1. Summarizing is useful to
  - a. understand the main ideas of the text
  - b. study for final exams
  - c. review articles at the beginning of a research paper
2. Include in your summary
  - a. the main idea (thesis/topic sentence)
  - b. the major supports to the main idea
  - c. the definitions of important KEY terms
  - d. the author's attitude toward the subject
3. DO NOT include in your summary
  - a. your own opinion
  - b. information not found in the source
  - c. minor details or unnecessary examples

Adapted from Swales, J. and Feak, C. (1994). *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*. Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan Press, 105 – 118.