

HOW TO WRITE A SUMMARY

A stand-alone summary is a summary produced to show a teacher that you have read and understood something. It is common in many freshman and sophomore level classes to get assignments that ask you to read a certain number of articles and summarize them. This is also a very common type of writing assignment in upper levels and in graduate school.

Developing a Summary

1. Read the article and be sure you understand it. Reading out loud is proven to increase understanding. Do not rush. Taking your time while reading will save you time in the long run.
2. As you read, outline the article. Note the major points and highlight phrases and parts that are specifically important.
3. Write a first draft of the summary without looking at the article, then go back and fully develop your summary, adding in details, paraphrases, and quotes as necessary.
4. Use paraphrase and quotes when writing a summary. When you give a paraphrase, don't forget that you still need to use appropriate in-text citation for that as well.

If you do copy a phrase from the original, be sure to put "quotation marks" around the phrase and use appropriate in-text citation. Also check that your font and font size match the rest of your paper.

Writing a Summary

1. Start your summary with a clear identification of the type of work, title, author, and main point in the present tense.

Example: In the article "Four Kinds of Reading," the author, Hall (1983), explains his opinion about different types of reading.

2. Write using summarizing language (signal phrases). Periodically remind your reader that this is a summary by using phrases such as

_____ [insert author's name] claims
he/she suggests
furthermore, _____ [insert author's name] goes on to say
another important point that _____ [insert author's name] makes is

3. Use the appropriate convention for the writer's name. Make sure and use the author's name periodically—not to do so is disrespectful to writer's hard work.

Do not write "it says" That is calling the author *it*.

If there is more than one author, make sure to include all of them unless the documentation style you're using has rules for shortening the list of authors.

4. Make sure to use correct in-text citation as described in a trustworthy style guide.

5. Use quotes to help add specifics and voice to your summary, but do not let them overwhelm the summary.
6. Check with the original reading and your outline to confirm you have covered the important points.
7. Never put any of your own ideas, opinions, or interpretations into the summary.
8. Provide a full citation of the article in correct format required in your assignment. DO NOT simply give the URL—that is not a citation. Read and follow the instructions in a trustworthy style guide. (Sometimes this will be required before the summary and other times afterward. Check your assignment guidelines or ask your instructor if it's not clear.)
9. Review the original assignment before you finish to make sure you have followed all of the instructions.
10. Proofread out loud, grammar check, and spell check! Make use of your college writing center!

Samples

ENGL 1302: Annotated Bibliography Assignment

- See the Annotated Bibliographies on the [Research Page](#).

INRW 0311: Summary/Response Assignment

- MLA Sample: [Yes, I Can: A Summary & Response to “The Myth of the Good Writer”](#)
- APA Sample: [What’s Between the Lines: “Text and Subtext”](#)
- APA Sample [with Annotations: What’s Between the Lines: “Text and Subtext”](#)

Also see this handout: [Summary/Response for Different Types of Readings](#)

(With the INRW samples, remember that’s my writing. It should be a bit more advanced—I have all those degrees. You’re just starting and it’s something to aim at; not something that happens at once. Step-by-Step)