Prof. Scanlan fall 2011

The Summary: The following is a guideline and not an ironclad law.

Critical reading for summary:

Critical reading is important for writing an accurate summary. If you can’t remember what you read, then have you really read it?

1. Identify the main points in the first paragraph. Underline or make margin notes (or both). The main point of this paragraph is often the main point of the entire work.

2. Identify the main idea of each subsequent paragraph and mark the text.

3. The final paragraph often contains the conclusion or confirmation of the author’s thesis. Compare the main idea of the first paragraph with the main idea in the final paragraph. Did you notice any changes in the author’s ideas?

Guidelines for writing summaries:

1. Read over your notes or margin notes.

2. Reread the entire work carefully.

3. Determine the structure of the writing.

4. Who, or what, are the main characters?

5. What is the style of the writing? Is it humorous, angry, scientific?

6. What is the author’s conclusion?

Now, using your notes, write a draft of your summary following this guide:

a. Author’s thesis. Make sure and identify the author’s name and the title of the writing.

b. Author’s more specific thesis.

c. Author’s structure and style.

d. Author’s conclusion.

Examples: Put these sentences in the right order.

Example 1:

Graham suggests that we develop a new model for love and relationships.

In her article “The Future of Love,” Barbara Graham describes how our unrealistic expectations about passionate love can lead to a troubled marriage. Ultimately, Graham claims that really understanding how relationships work can help couples and perhaps help us to dispel harmful myths surrounding love and marriage. In order to prove her argument, she uses current research on biochemistry and psychology to push against popular myths about love. Her style is factual and balanced; she gives even-handed credit to several popular ideas of romance.

Example 2:

The narrative style of the story written in third person. Ultimately, Brently Mallard walks through the door and Louise dies. Mrs. Louise Mallard, who has heart trouble, hears that her husband has died in a railroad accident. This is a short story by Kate Chopin titled “The Story of an Hour.” Or, she thinks that Brently Mallard has died. Louise’s inner thoughts are described and so is the scene outside her window.