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Writing a Summary

A summary briefly presents in your own words the main point and supporting ideas of a piece of writing. Strive for a clear, objective, concise description of the text. Summaries can vary in length; a one-sentence summary is necessarily different than a one-page summary. In writing a one-paragraph summary of a text, remember that should have the following characteristics:

- it should present the full name of the author, the title of the text, and the type of text it is
- it should capture the main idea and supporting arguments of the text
- it should be neutral in tone
- it should focus on the text at hand—you will have other opportunities to provide your opinion and related experiences
- it should consist largely of your own words, with only an occasional short quotation
- it should identify the text's main point or thesis, as well as a few supporting ideas or key steps the writer goes through to develop the thesis
- since it cannot detail the entire piece, it should show your selective choices of which aspects to focus on.
- it does not need to follow the sequence of the text—you should be digesting the text for your reader, re-ordering them where necessary.

In writing an effective summary paragraph, you need to show that you grasp the writer's thesis, present it clearly in your own words, and show what ideas the author uses to support it. To do so, consider the following questions:

- Who is the speaker or narrator, according to self-description or other clues in the text?
- What time period is the text about? When was it written or published?
- Is the text focused on a particular neighborhood, place, city, or nation?
- What is the tone of the text? Would you say that it is humorous, frustrated, angry, inspirational, relieved, matter-of-fact, or any combination?
- How does the speaker/narrator support his or her ideas? Through description of personal experience? An analysis of experiments or other data? A review of a few important thinkers?

Borrowed in part from "Summarizing an Essay" by Prof. Jane Mushabac and from "Summary and Response Essay" by Prof. Matthew Gold.