

WRITING A SUMMARY OF AN ARTICLE

WHAT IS A SUMMARY?

A summary restates the main ideas of an author in your own words. It keeps the essential information from the original passage while eliminating most supporting details, such as the examples and illustrations. A good summary makes the author's ideas clear, perhaps even clearer than in the original.

What is the difference between an abridgement, a paraphrase, and a summary?

An **abridgement** is a shortened form of a work that to a great extent keeps the language of the original. Although an editor has made decisions about which words or passages to delete, the article or book is presented as the work of the original author.

A **paraphrase** differs from an abridgement in that it is written in language different from the original. It follows the order of the original text and, unlike a summary, it recasts everything, not just the main ideas. It may be shorter than the original, but it could be longer.

A **summary** is generally much shorter than the original text. It includes only key ideas and omits the details. It may or may not follow the order of the original. Because you must decide how all of the ideas fit together, writing a summary requires more skill than writing a paraphrase. A paraphrase is a list of sentences; a summary is a group of connected sentences revealing how the author's ideas are related.

HOW TO WRITE A SUMMARY

1. Preview the article to get an idea of what it is about. Read the title, headings, first paragraph, first sentence of the following paragraphs, and the last paragraph.
2. Read carefully. Photocopy the article so that you can underline or highlight the main ideas. Be selective. Mark only the main ideas. (Try to limit yourself to no more than 20% of the original.) Write the main idea of each paragraph in the margin and also make notes about the purpose of the paragraph (For example, does it provide examples of a main point or serve as a transition to another point?)
3. Express in one sentence the thesis or main idea of the article. A good model for your first sentence is to include the author's name, the title, and the thesis. In "Essays to Read at the Beach," Frances Payne (discusses, states, argues). . . **THESIS OF THE ARTICLE.**
4. Write your first draft, using what you have underlined and written. You can keep this draft simple by following the order of ideas in the original.

Remind the reader several times that you are summarizing another author's work:
"Payne also notes that . . ."

6. Write a shorter version of your first draft, this time imposing your own order on the ideas and making decisions about what information is essential.

7. Keep quotations short. If your assignment permits you to quote directly, it's usually better not to quote entire sentences. Summarize a portion of the quotation and quote only the most important words.

8. Read your summary carefully to make sure that the meaning of the original article would be clear to someone who has not read it.

TIP: If you are having trouble understanding an article, either because its ideas are complex or because its organization is confusing, try writing a short paraphrase of each paragraph. The meaning will probably be clearer after you have worked your way through the article, so you could then write a shorter version of your paraphrase, trying to eliminate those ideas that don't seem essential. At this point you should be ready to write a summary, an even shorter version of your paraphrase that suggests your understanding of the way the ideas fit together.

What is a summary report?

A summary report presents information from several sources on a topic, generally without adding any of the writer's opinions. Your assignment may require you to include your opinion. If you are not sure, ask your professor.

If you don't have specific guidelines from your teacher on how to organize a summary report, you could try this format:

- (1) short introductory paragraph that expresses a theme that somehow ties the essays together
- (2) summary of first article
- (3) transition to next article
- (4) summary of second article, etc.
- (5) a conclusion that restates the theme you set up in the first paragraph.

What is a summary-response essay?

A summary does not include your opinion; a summary-response essay requires you to respond to the ideas in an essay and come up with a thesis that expresses your opinion. Summary is one component of that sort of paper, not the entire paper.

If you don't have specific guidelines from your teacher on how to organize a summary-response paper, you could try this format:

An introductory paragraph which includes one or two sentences stating the

author's name, the title of the essay, and the essay's thesis; a sentence or two summing up your response,

which you might think of as raising the points you want to make about the author's thesis

(2) A paragraph or two summarizing the essay

(3) A paragraph or two exploring your thoughts about the article.

TIP: Usually you aren't required to respond to every point made by the author. You can address the main argument and respond to several secondary ideas, perhaps adding your examples or drawing connections between the author's ideas and your own experiences.

TIP: Another way to organize the paper would be to summarize one main point made in the original article, respond to it, and then summarize another point and respond to that one.

A SUMMARY

In "Essays to Read at the Beach," Frances Payne argues that spring break is the perfect time for college students to get caught up on all of those essays their professors have assigned since classes began in August. She points out that a photocopy of an essay can be slipped into a carry-on bag for the flight to Cancun and then discarded after a careful reading. According to Payne, students also derive much satisfaction from combining sun, fun, and interaction with complex ideas. The author drew her conclusions from a 1997 survey of 1,200 college students.

The first paragraph of a summary report

Two recent articles explore the topic of what college students like to read at the beach during spring break. Although the authors draw different conclusions, they report similar data.

The first paragraph of a summary response essay

In "Essays to Read at the Beach," Frances Payne argues that spring break is the perfect time for college students to get caught up on all of those essays their professors have assigned since classes began in August. I have doubts about the validity of the survey Payne conducted, and I question her interpretation of the data.