Guidelines for writing a summary

Christine Bauer-Ramazani

The purpose of a summary is to give the reader, in about 1/3 of the original length of an article/lecture, a clear, objective picture of the original lecture or text. Most importantly, **the summary restates only the main points of a text or a lecture without giving examples or details**, such as dates, numbers or statistics.

Skills practiced: **note-taking, paraphrasing** (using your own words and sentence structure), condensing

Before writing a summary

1. For a text, **read, mark,** and **annotate** the original. (For a lecture, work with the notes you took.)
    - o highlight the topic sentence
    - o highlight key points/key words/phrases
    - o highlight the concluding sentence
    - o outline each paragraph in the margin
2. **Take notes** on the following:
    - o the source (author--first/last name, title, date of publication, volume number, place of publication, publisher, URL, etc.)
    - o the main idea of the original (**paraphrased**)
    - o the major supporting points (in outline form)
    - o major supporting explanations (e.g. reasons/causes or effects)

Writing your summary - steps

1. Organize your notes into an outline which includes main ideas and supporting points **but no examples or details** (dates, numbers, statistics).
2. Write an introductory paragraph that begins with a frame, including an **in-text citation of the source** and the author as well as a reporting verb to introduce the main idea. **The reporting verb is generally in the present tense**.
3. At the end of your summary, double-space and write a **reference** for the in-text citation

ARTICLE:

In his/her article (or lecture) "_____," _____ (year)

(title, first letter capitalized)   (author/lecturer's last name)

argues/claims/reports/contends/maintains/states that

_____.

(main idea/argument; S + V + C)

Example: In his article "Michael Dell turns the PC world inside out," Andrew E. Serwer (1997) describes how Michael Dell founded Dell Computers and claims that Dell's low-cost, direct-sales strategy and high quality standards account for Dell's enormous success.

BOOK:

In his book *The Pearl*, John Steinbeck (1945) illustrates the fight between good and evil in humankind.

INTERVIEW:

In my interview with him/her (date), _____ (first name, last name) stated that ....

Reporting Verbs:

STRONG ARGUMENT ==> NEUTRAL==> COUNTERARGUMENT ==> SUGGESTION==>

CRITICISM

argue	state	refute the claim	suggest	criticize
claim	report	argue against	recommend	
contend	explain			
maintain	discuss			
insist	illustrate			
posit	observe			

Other examples of frames:

- According to _____ (year), _____.

    (author's last name)   (main idea; S + V + C)

- _____'s article on _____ (year) discusses the _____.

    (author's last name)   (topic)   (main idea; Noun Phrase)

- _____ (year), in his/her article, "_____" argues that _____.

  author's last name)   (title of article)   (main idea; S + V

  + C)

- According to "Title of the Article" (year), _____.

  (main idea; S+V+C)

- _____ has a major impact on _____ (author's last name, year).

  (topic/NP)   (NP)

3. The main idea or argument needs to be included in this first sentence. Then mention the **major** aspects/factors/reasons that are discussed in the article/lecture. Give a full reference for this citation at the end of the summary (see #6. below).

a. For a **one-paragraph summary**, discuss each supporting point in a separate sentence. Give 1-2 explanations for each supporting point, summarizing the information from the original.

b. For a **multi-paragraph summary**, discuss each supporting point in a separate paragraph. Introduce it in the first sentence (topic sentence).

Example: The first major area in which women have become a powerful force is politics.

4. Support your topic sentence with the necessary reasons or arguments raised by the author/lecturer but omit all references to details, such as dates or statistics.

5. Use discourse markers that reflect the organization and controlling idea of the original, for example cause-effect, comparison-contrast, classification, process, chronological order, persuasive argument, etc.

6. In a longer summary, remind your reader that you are paraphrasing by using "**reminder phrases**," such as

   o   The author goes on to say that ...

   o   The article (author) further states that ...

   o   (Author's last name) also states/maintains/argues that ...

   o   (Author's last name) also believes that ...

   o   (Author's last name) concludes that

7. Restate the article's/lecturer's conclusion in one sentence.

8. Give a full reference for the citation (see the example below for the in-text citations in #2).