Writing a Summary

A summary is a condensed version of another piece of writing.

1. It is shorter than the original, usually 10-20% of the original.
2. It contains only the main idea(s) and supporting major ideas.
3. It omits most if not all examples and other details.
4. It is written in your own words.

A summary often begins from the opening paragraph with information about the original source’s author and title, followed by a restatement of the thesis in terms of the author’s main purpose for writing the original piece.

Here are some common verbs used to express what an author’s purpose may be:

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The summary usually begins with a sentence that often takes this form:

In <article or book title>, <author> <verb> that/ how <clause explaining main idea>.

For example:

In <his autobiography>, <Malcolm X> <describes> how <he fought prejudice>.

In <"The Roman God">, <Professor Smith> <argues> that <Caesar was an alcoholic>.

Then the main points of the original writing are restated in your own words.

To summarize an article:

1. First read the entire article (several times if necessary to get the meaning).
2. Then determine what the author’s main idea or thesis is.
3. Express the main idea in one sentence, including the author’s name and the title of the writing.
4. Next, divide the article into MAJOR parts. Each division might contain more than one paragraph.
5. Using one or two sentences for each part, describe what the author is trying to say or do.
6. Make sure your descriptions of each part move smoothly from one to the next: use appropriate transitions.

Some summaries are evaluative in nature. That is, the summary writer expresses an opinion about what the author of the original has said or about how the author has made the points. Some summaries are NON-evaluative. In non-evaluative summaries, the summary writer is asked to communicate WHAT the original writing said and/or describe HOW the writer is proving the thesis, without any evaluation. The assignment you will have to submit is a NON-evaluative summary. This means that it must not include the writer’s opinion/evaluation of the article to be summarized, but a description of the article and how the writer is proving the thesis.
Summary 1 Essay Writing Assignment Directions

For this first essay, you are to write a summary essay based on the first reading article *Education Under Stress*, located on pp. 3-16 in the course textbook. You will write several drafts of this essay, so this assignment will constitute your first draft. Although you will write several drafts, your first draft should be as complete as possible so that you will get as much good feedback as possible from me, your classmates, and the Smarthinking online tutors.

Your essay should be 1-2 pp. in length and follow an expected essay structure and style. Your essay must be typed and follow guidelines provided in part 4 of the Course Requirements section of the class syllabus. For additional guidelines about writing a summary essay, refer to the course handout “Summary Guidelines”.

You must bring your essay to class on the date that it is due so that you can participate in classroom peer response activities. In addition, after you have written your essay, you must send a copy of it to the Smarthinking tutors for further feedback.