Summary: a short presentation, in paragraph form, that condenses the pertinent material of a longer work (essay or chapter in a text).

Being able to summarize the key points of a writer’s work is an essential skill for a student to possess. Summaries reduce complex ideas and concepts to their most salient points. Summary skills enhance reading for understanding.

Uses of a summary:

• Summaries are useful in research. They make note-taking efficient.
• Summaries are useful as study guides for tests. By summarizing the key points of a text, you will not have to re-read the work when it comes time to study for an exam on the material.

Getting Started:

• Begin with a clear mind. If you are thinking of other things, it will be difficult to understand the writer’s points.
• Read the passage slowly the first time without taking notes; stop and then read it a second time, this time with a pen and paper in hand.
• During the second reading, take short notes that contain the main ideas of the author. Look up unfamiliar key terms. ***

*** For especially difficult material, attempt to summarize each paragraph in a single sentence.

Summarizing:

• Look for the author’s thesis, or main idea, and the reasons that he/she offers to back up these ideas. This is the key to summarizing: finding the author’s objective in writing the essay.
• In the first sentence of the summary, give the author’s thesis. Also include the author’s full name and his/her credentials (e.g., columnist for the New York Times; professor of classics at Princeton) and the title of the essay.

example: Edward Williams, professor of history at Dartmouth, argues in his essay “The Lost World of the Incas” that...
• In the remainder of the summary, follow the order in which the author presents his/her argument.

• Finally, proofread or review your summary for grammatical and spelling errors and for a logical progression of thought.

Some Reminders:

• Do not include your own opinion on the subject or on the writer’s style. A summary is different than a critique.

• Make your summary much shorter than the work you are summarizing. Do not re-write (paraphrase) the author's work; rather, simplify and abbreviate it.

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