

Writing Center Reference Sheet

Guidelines for Summary Writing

Being able to sum up the key points of a text is an important skill, whether you are condensing source information for a research paper or summarizing an essay prior to responding to it. Following the steps below will help you to write an effective summary in your own words.

- 1) **Read the text carefully, making notes and/or marking key ideas.** You may need to read it two or three times to discern the main points.
- 2) **Identify the main points, as opposed to lesser points or examples** that merely illustrate points. It may help to break the essay down into parts (paragraphs, sections), looking for the main point(s) of each part.
- 3) **Write the main ideas out in paragraph form, using your own words to avoid plagiarism.** It will help if you do not look at the essay while writing the summary, so that you will be less likely to mirror the wording of the original text. Try not to quote in a summary, unless there are particularly significant phrases that you feel need to be expressed in the original words; be sure to use quotation marks if you do quote and to cite the author and page number.
- 4) **Do not put your opinion of the text or the topic in the summary.**
- 5) **Identify the author and the title of the text at the beginning** of your summary, and then **refer to the author frequently** throughout the summary to keep it clear whose ideas these are. **Cite the page number(s) of the source at the end of the summary.**
- 6) **Write the summary in present tense.**
- 7) **Make the summary of the main points concise** by avoiding unneeded words and phrases and by combining sentences when possible.
- 8) **Edit the summary**, connecting ideas, avoiding short, choppy sentences, and correcting errors.
- 9) **Compare the summary to the essay once more** to make certain that you have included all of the key points in your summary and that you have used your own words to express the ideas.