

How to Write a Summary

A "stand-alone" summary is a summary produced to show a teacher that you have read and understood something. It is common in many 100 and 200 level classes to get assignments that ask you to read a certain number of articles and summarize them. This is also a very common type of writing assignment in graduate school.

How to produce a summary:

1. Read the article to be summarized and be sure you understand it.
2. Outline the article. Note the major points.
3. Write a first draft of the summary without looking at the article.
4. Always use paraphrase when writing a summary. If you do copy a phrase from the original be sure it is a very important phrase that is necessary and cannot be paraphrased. In this case put "quotation marks" around the phrase.
5. Target your first draft for approximately 1/4 the length of the original.

The features of a summary:

1. Start your summary with a clear identification of the type of work, title, author, and main point in the present tense.
2. Example: In the feature article "Four Kinds of Reading," the author, Donald Hall, explains his opinion about different types of reading.
3. Check with your outline and your original to make sure you have covered the important points.
4. Never put any of your own ideas, opinions, or interpretations into the summary. This means you have to be very careful of your word choice. There is essentially no room for using the first person (I, my, etc.) in this assignment.
5. Write using "summarizing language." Periodically remind your reader that this is a summary by using phrases such as *the article claims*, *the author suggests*, etc.