Writing a Summary in 8 Steps

A summary is intended to highlight objectively the main points of another writer’s work. Although written in your own words, the summary does not include your opinions of the piece you are considering. Since the summary eliminates those details that are not needed to convey the major points, it is naturally shorter than the original. The problem we all face when attempting to summarize a piece of writing is figuring out what to include and what to leave out.

1. Divide and Conquer:

   Skim the text you are going to summarize and divide it into sections. Focus on any headings and subheadings. Also look at any bold-faced terms and make sure you understand them before you read.

2. Read:

   Now that you’ve prepared, go ahead and read the selection. Read straight through—just get a feel for the author’s tone, style, and main idea.

3. Reread:

   Rereading should be *active* reading. Underline topic sentences and key facts. Label areas that you want to refer to as you write your summary.

4. One Sentence at a Time:

   You should now have a firm grasp on the text you will be summarizing. Now write down the main idea of each section in one well-developed sentence. Make sure that what you include in your sentences are key points, not minor details.

5. Write a Thesis Statement:

   This is the key to any well-written summary. Review the sentences you wrote in step 4, then create a thesis that clearly communicates what the entire text was trying to achieve.

6. Ready to Write:

   You can use the thesis statement as the introductory sentence of your summary, and your other sentences can make up the body. Add some transition words that help with the overall structure and flow of the summary.
7. Check for Accuracy:
   Reread your summary and make certain that you have accurately represented the author’s ideas and key points. Make sure that you have correctly cited anything directly quoted from the text. Also check to make sure that your text does not contain your own commentary on the piece.

8. Revise:
   Once you are certain that your summary is accurate, you should revise it for style, grammar, and punctuation. If you have time, give your summary to someone else to read. This person should be able to understand the main text based on your summary alone.

Helpful Tips:

- Write in present tense.
- Make sure to include the author and title of the work.
- Be concise: a summary should not be equal in length to the original text.
- If you must use the words of the author, cite them.
- Don’t put your own opinions, ideas, or interpretations into the summary. The purpose of writing a summary is to accurately represent what the author wanted to say, not to provide a critique.
- Cross out the less important details.
- Underline topic sentences and key ideas.
- Take notes on those key ideas—jot down the information that clarifies the topic sentence, for example.