

Summary

The process of summarizing requires reading, thinking, and writing. It requires you to break down a text, analyze its parts, and piece them back together again using your own words but maintaining the author's original intent.

A written summary has four defining features:

- It is short.
- It tells what is most important to the author.
- It is written in your own words.
- It states the information someone unfamiliar with the reading would need to have in order to understand the author's main argument, central ideas, and the connections between them.

Follow these steps to help you write a summary:

1. Preview the text by looking through it and reading captions, notes, headings, sub-headings, charts/graphs, and identifying key words (usually in bold or italics). Read the first and last paragraphs. Note the following:
 - Author:
 - Author's credentials (if known):
 - Publication type:
 - Title of the text:
 - Topic:
 - Date of publication:
 - Based on the title and other features of the text, what information/ideas might this text present?
 - Will the text present a negative or positive view of the topic?
 - What argument or position about the topic might the text present?
 - Turn the title into a question:
 - Answer the question after reading the text:

2. Quickly read through the text, paying attention to the big ideas, problems, or concepts addressed. Your goal is to get a general feel for the text, how it flows, and what the author wants you to know. Think about the text as a whole; what does it all add up to?
Given this quick read, what is the topic?
What is the message about the topic? (the big idea/problem/concept that is addressed)
3. Re-read the text very carefully and annotate: highlight main ideas, make notes in the margins, write questions you need clarified, etc. Your goal here is to identify the central idea of each paragraph and try to figure out how each individual paragraph links to the main topic of the text. When this step is completed, your thoughts and ideas should be evident in the notes you've written on the text.
4. Look back at your annotations and determine which paragraphs go together, meaning they serve the same purpose and form a "chunk." Sometimes two or three paragraphs may refer to the same aspect of the topic. For example, an author might use two paragraphs to explain why the topic is important. Thus, these paragraphs can be chunked together as they serve one purpose: to establish the importance of the topic. Draw a box around the paragraphs which should be chunked together. To help determine where to draw your boxes, notice where the author shifts purpose or moves from one idea to the next. The points at which these shifts occur indicate where one chunk ends and a new chunk begins.
5. Using the information gathered through your annotation of the text and your chunking, fill in the handout titled "Charting a Text." See Student Handouts 1.5b and 1.5c.
6. Carefully review the analysis on your chart and determine the author's main argument or stand concerning the topic. Write your ideas in the space provided at the end of your chart.
7. Work together with peers to discuss/negotiate how you have charted the text AND try to reach consensus regarding the author's main argument on the topic. Adjust your notes as needed.
8. Using all the information you've compiled, complete the summary template provided. See Student Handout 1.5d.