Why Should You Summarize?

When you summarize, you are stating another writers’ main ideas in your own words in as few sentences as possible. You summarize to:

- Provide context so that readers understand where your own argument fits.
- Show that you understand a piece of writing or an argument.
- Present a long piece of writing in a short, concise way.
- Avoid plagiarizing or quoting long passages from another writer.

How to Summarize

Here are some steps to take if you are not sure how to summarize:

- Read the original text and mark (underline, highlight, etc.) areas you believe to be the author’s main ideas.
- Start your summary by mentioning the title of the text and the author’s name.
  - For example:


Remember:

- Use your own words.
- Quote any words that you are borrowing directly from the original text.
- Use a neutral tone unless you are analyzing the text. In other words, do not say whether you agree or disagree with the author unless the assignment asks you to.
- Make sure you are presenting the author’s main ideas.
- Use the present tense unless your professor or literary style says differently.
Signal Verbs to Introduce Your Summaries

Summaries can begin with certain words depending on how the author is presenting the information. The following signal verbs are borrowed from the book *They Say I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* and can help you start your summaries.

**Verbs for Making a Claim**

argue
asset
believe
claim
emphasize
insist
observe
remind us
report
suggest

**Verbs for Expressing Agreement**

acknowledge
admire
agree
celebrate the fact that
corroborate
do not deny
endorse
extol
praise
reaffirm
support
verify

**Verbs for Questioning or Disagreeing**

complain
complicate
contend
contradict
deny
deplore the tendency to
disavow
question
refute
renounce
repudiate

**Verbs for Making Recommendations**

advocate
call for
demand
encourage
exhort
implore
plead
recommend
urge
warn
Summaries can be anywhere between a couple of sentences and several pages. How long your summary depends on what type of essay you are writing. Refer back to your writing prompt for specific requirements. Be on the lookout for words like “analyze” and “explain” that may signal shorter summaries.

References

