

HOW TO SUMMARIZE

..... a practical handout

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:

In their book, *Holistic Teaching for Modern Teachers*, Villanueva and Fisher (2015) recommend incorporating culturally relevant material to help students build stronger connections between themselves and lessons being taught in class.

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
assert
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

How Long Should a Summary Be?

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

Center for Writing Studies. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Retrieved October 23, 2018 from <http://www.cws.illinois.edu/workshop/writers/tips/summary/>

Graff, G. & Birkenstein, C. 2006. *They say I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Hacker, D. 2002. *The Bedford Handbook*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.