

Academic Summary Writing

The *genre* of the summary:

- In sum, summaries are short, un-evaluative analyses of an author's complete argument. It is not our goal in summary writing to merely discuss the ideas within the text (although these might come up); instead, we're most interested in the *author* him- or herself, the *claims* he or she makes, the *ways* he or she works to support those claims and the possible *reasons* for composing the text the way it is. That is, our main task is to tell the story of WHAT an author is *doing*, HOW s/he gets the job done, and WHY.

What summaries are *not*:

- Your response to or evaluation of the text (like, dislike, what's missing, what's important, etc.)
- Your personal reflections of what you learned or how you were affected by the text
- You writing as author of a shorter, paraphrased version of the text (*Ivy League schools use discriminatory practices like excluding students based on the race and physical appearance.*)
- Your listing of major claims and concepts (without making meaningful connections)
- Your own argument or analysis as inspired by the text (including your own intro and examples)
- Your explanation of a single example to illustrate major points
- Your defining and interpretation of major terms
- Your delivery of important quotes from the text (with your substitution of sentences for quotes)

Summaries should include:

- THE WHO, WHAT, & WHY as intro: Identify *the rhetorical context*
 - Contextual information about the author and text (including publication info)
 - A brief and concise explanation of the overall argument made by the author
 - The author's purpose in writing the text
 - Note: our idea of catchy introductions does not apply and is not needed
- THE HOW as the body: Summarizing reasons, evidence, and structure
 - An explanation of the overall reasons and/or evidence to support the argument, paraphrasing examples sparingly
 - A short description of the author's organization scheme (citing sections)
- Conclusions: none needed

Extra tips for summary writing:

- Summaries should be written for an audience unfamiliar with the text. Ask yourself, "From this summary, would someone who has never read this article be able to grasp the main argument, purpose, and ideas presented that the author presents?"
- Cite page numbers when paraphrasing or referencing certain parts of the text
- Use strong verbs to discuss what an author is *doing*, not what the author is *saying* (see handout titled "I know what it says...but what does it do?")
- Don't forget how important accuracy is! Ask yourself (and others): Does my paraphrase make sense? Is this really what the author is saying or am I BSing this thing?