

Writing Academic Summaries

What are *academic summaries*?

- In sum, academic summaries are short, un-evaluative analyses of an author's complete argument. It's more than a restatement of the main ideas. We're also interested in the *author* him- or herself, the *claims* he or she makes, and the *ways* he or she works to support those claims. That is, our main task is to tell the story of WHAT the author is **doing** and HOW s/he gets the job done.

What should you address in an academic summary?

- Rhetorical situation (information about the author, audience, text, purpose, and context).
- Main argument
- Main support
- Notable features (optional)
 - Organization scheme
 - Strategies/Appeals
 - Strengths
 - Weaknesses/Limitations

What academic summaries are *not*:

- Your response to or evaluation of the text (your opinions or feelings about what's good/bad or wrong/right, 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 with no mention of the text (e.g., *Millennials today create new challenges for employers...*).
- 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 or of major terms
- Your recitation of important quotes from the text

Extra Tips

- attend to the full arguments/project rather than exemplify the most interesting or the earliest claims
- avoid relying on quotes and aim to paraphrase instead
- attribute ideas to the author (Author VERB; according to AUTHOR; etc.), but try to vary your sentence structure (so that it's not sentence after sentence of "The author x")
- avoid the list format (where you just list chronologically various things the author does)
- be careful that an analysis of strategies doesn't overshadow an overview of the main argument
- balance the says/does: don't just say, "she concludes with some suggestions." Expand on this to indicate what those suggestions are.
- actually name they type/kind of support (evidence and reasons) used
- pay special attention to ensuring your summary is accurate (challenge your own descriptions to ensure they truly represent the rhetorical situation and what the author says and does)
- use strong and relevant verbs to describe what the author does (use charting handout)
- don't rely on summaries online

Summary Checklist

MEETING THE MAJOR REQUIREMENTS

1. Does my summary include:
 - All parts of the rhetorical situation: contextual details about the author (background/credentials), his/her text (including title and publication year), the intended audience, and pertinent background information (as in what the text is responding to)?
 - A brief and concise explanation of the author's purpose in writing the text? Do I support my discussion of purpose by drawing evidence from the text?
 - A brief and concise explanation of the overall argument made by the author? Do I cover the *full* range of his/her multifaceted argument? Is my summary of his/her argument accurate?
 - An explanation of the overall reasons and/or evidence to support the argument? Do I carefully support my discussion with selective and brief examples from his/her text?
 - A description of the author's organizational scheme (how the text/argument unfolds)?
2. Did I introduce and summarize the text in a way that readers unfamiliar with his/her text and our class would sufficiently understand what s/he does in his/her text and how s/he does it?
3. How effectively do I remain objective and keep outside information out? Do I keep my opinions/evaluations/outside knowledge/personal responses out of my summary?

EXTRA POLISHING

4. Do I give the author's full name once and then only refer to him/her by last name?
5. Do I select strong and appropriate verbs (avoiding simple verbs like "says" and "states")? Do I use the present tense when writing about what the author does (she ARGUES, he CLAIMS)?
6. Am I careful to put quotation marks around copied passages and to cite page numbers?
7. Do I quote enough or quote too much?
 - For short papers like this, quotes should serve a purpose and they shouldn't be longer than 3 lines worth. Limit your quoting. Paraphrase what you can or quote only specific phrases or words. No need to quote every time. Do you put quotation marks around copied text?
8. Have I formatted my paper?
 - Name, date, instructor, & course located in the upper-left corner, double spaced
 - Last Name & Page #: located in the upper-right corner on every page
 - No extra spaces between Name Heading & Title
 - Title the text something like, "Summary of AUTHOR'S NAME and TEXT TITLE."
 - No extra spaces between Title and Introductory Paragraph
 - Align Text Left (NOT justified)
 - Every paragraph should be indented. No extra spaces between paragraphs.
 - Articles & chapters are in quotes. Magazines, newspapers, films, & books are italicized.
 - Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, double spaced, 1" margin?