

## Writing a Summary

A summary is a condensed version of an original text that communicates the text's most important information. When writing a summary, you focus on the **main ideas** of the original. You must also make decisions about which concepts to include and omit, taking into consideration your purposes of summarizing the text.

### Purposes of a Summary

The main purposes of writing a summary are:

- to help you understand the main points and structure of the author's argument
- to convey understanding to others
- to present background information quickly.

### How do I begin?

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One of the most difficult parts about writing a summary is knowing how to start. Ideally, summary writing should follow these steps:

1. Read the text for detailed comprehension. This is achieved through multiple readings by skimming, scanning, and then performing a closer, more detailed reading of the text.
2. Once you have developed a comprehensive understanding of the text, re-read each paragraph and try to locate the main idea of that paragraph.
3. Write down these main ideas in your own words.
4. From these main ideas, create a thesis statement in a sentence that clearly communicates what the entire text is trying to achieve. Essentially, what is the author's central argument?
5. Now you can use the thesis statement as the introductory sentence of your summary, and your other sentences can make up the body. Make sure that they are in order. Add some appropriate transition words (such as however, also, moreover) that help with the overall structure and flow of the summary.



#### Key tip: Use signal phrases

An effective summary uses signal phrases appropriately. A signal phrase includes a verb and the name of the author who produced the work about which you are writing. The formula for this is noun + verb: **Kim Stevens explains** why students' study skills are important.

Examples of signal verbs include:

<b>Strong Argument</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Research results</b>	<b>Counterargument</b>	<b>Suggestions</b>
argues	acknowledges	demonstrates	refutes	advises
asserts	discusses	finds		recommends
claims	explains	illustrates		suggests
contends	notes	indicates		
maintains	observes	points out		
insists		prove		
posits				

## Structure of a Summary

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Your summary should follow a specific structure. Use this template to assist with your summary writing. Note that summaries should always be written in the present tense.

When summarizing academic work, the first sentence of your summary should read as follows:

**[Brief description of the subject of the work) + (name of author/s) + (verb) + (thesis / central argument).**

**Example in MLA:** In his critique of modern medicine, Robert W. Virtue argues that developments in medical technology have failed to improve the health of Americans.

**Note:** You only use the author's first name and surname when introducing them for the first time. Any time after that, you only need to write their surname.

**Example in APA:** In his study, Serwer (1997) reveals how Michael Dell founded Dell Computers and claims that Dell's low-cost, direct-sales strategy and high-quality standards accounted for Dell's enormous success.



**Key tip:** If no author is given, use the title of the article.

The sentences following your opening sentence should provide the author's main ideas that support the thesis you have just provided. You want to write how the author proves their argument without any subjective analysis or criticism. The closing sentence of your summary will be a condensed, one-sentence version of the author's conclusion. In total, your summary should be no more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  the original text.

## Summary Checklist

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Use the following checklist to critique your own summaries.

	Yes	No
The first sentence provides the title and author of the original work.		
The writer's thesis or main purpose is stated clearly and worded concisely.		
Each main point of the original is restated clearly.		
The summary contains no secondary details, ideas, or opinions that could be eliminated without decreasing the reader's understanding.		
The summary uses objective language.		
The summary is written in the present tense.		
No new ideas are introduced, and none of the original ideas have been over or understated.		



**Key tip:** Always revise your summary for coherence and concision. Make sure your summary is more than a list of points. A successful summary will retain a sense of the connection between points. If a word, phrase, or sentence is not truly needed for your summary, eliminate it.