

Summary Process

Here are the steps for a good summary:

1. Read the text very carefully and then jot down the author's main point; use your own words.
2. Look at every paragraph (or chapter in a longer text) and pick out the sentence that seems to capture the main point of that paragraph (or chapter); write the sentence down.
3. Study the sentences you have written down from each paragraph and try to determine how each one contributes to the main point of the essay as you have described in step 1. Briefly describe, for yourself, how the author leads the reader to the conclusion (or main point). If you have difficulty with this, you may have to adjust your assessment of the author's main point, or you may have to reconsider the sentences you picked. In each case, you will have to go through the essay (or chapter) again.
4. Pick one sentence that you feel captures the essence of the essay the best. (You can usually find this sentence in the opening or final paragraph.) This is likely to be the author's thesis statement or conclusion. Use this sentence somewhere in your summary.
5. Write the summary:
 - A. Since a summary always intends to inform its reader (yourself or someone else) what the original is about, begin by stating the main point of the essay as neutrally, clearly and concisely as you can.
 - B. Describe how the author makes the point; again, keep it neutral, brief and clear.
 - C. Finally, based on your list of sentences, paraphrase the interim points. (Join them and/or roll them into one statement, whenever you can, without losing the neutrality, clarity or meaning of the original.) Reword your opening statement of the main point to let it be the conclusion.
6. Carefully read your summary once again and revise and edit it to take out any remaining grammar, mechanics, or other errors you find.

Written by Adien Dubbelboer, Academic Coordinator for English 255-Effective Writing at Athabasca University