Summary Writing

A summary

- gives the reader a condensed account of the main ideas in a text.
- is often no more than a few paragraphs long (or between ten and twenty percent of the original text).
- reports accurately and objectively what the original author has said.
- addresses the following:
  ◦ the subject of the article
  ◦ the author’s main point
  ◦ the kind of evidence the author uses: Scientific studies? Personal research or experience?
  ◦ the author’s conclusions: What does the author want the reader to think about this topic?

A process for writing summaries:

Step One: Preview

- Before you read, consider the title and other headings – what do they suggest this text will be about?
- Consider the author’s background. Is s/he an expert in this field? Does s/he have a bias?
- What is his/her purpose for writing? To persuade? To inform?
- Who is the intended audience?
- Where was the text originally published?

Step Two: Read

- Identify the author’s thesis – where in the text does the author state the main point?
- Divide the text into logical sections; headings and paragraph breaks will be a useful guide.
- Label each section or stage of thought (on the text itself).
- Highlight/underline key ideas and terms.
- Annotate the text in the margin
  ◦ label main points – explain why they’re important
  ◦ define key terms
  ◦ ask questions
  ◦ respond to the author in your notes, indicating if you agree or disagree.

Step Three: Thesis and One-sentence Summaries

- Write a thesis: a one-sentence statement which cites the author, title of the text, and expresses the main idea in your own words.
- Write one-sentence summaries of each section or stage of thought in your own words.
- Include author tags (i.e. according to, the author claims, the author cites research suggesting).
- Report the main ideas as objectively as possible, but avoid summarizing specific examples or data.

Step Four: First Draft

- Combine the thesis and one-sentence summaries with significant details from the passage.
- Use as few words as possible to convey the main idea.
- Eliminate repetition; disregard or generalize minor details.
- Use your own words; quote only the most important terms.

Step Five: Revise the Summary

- Check your summary against the original passage to see if the summary is accurate and complete.
- Does your summary use as few words as possible to convey the main ideas?
- Be sure the summary is primarily in your own words, with only brief but essential quotes.