

Writing a Summary*

A summary is an objective re-statement of a written passage in your own words. A summary is always much shorter than the original because it omits the specific examples, comments, anecdotes, and other rhetorical strategies authors use to add emphasis and interest.

Key Features of a Summary

Summaries are original. They should use your own language and phrasing, not the language and phrasing of the source.

Summaries are concise. They should always be much shorter than the original (approximately 1/3 of the original).

Summaries are accurate. They should precisely express the main idea of your source.

Summaries are objective. They should not include your opinion.

Summary Checklist (refer to this whenever you write a summary)

Content

- ✓ Mention the title of the piece.
- ✓ Include the author's full name.
- ✓ Mention something about the author's background and/or credentials.
- ✓ Identify the author's main point or thesis.
- ✓ Identify the author's major supporting ideas.
- ✓ Don't include secondary details.
- ✓ Sum up the author's conclusions.
- ✓ Do not comment on or otherwise express your opinion or commentary in the summary.

Style

- ✓ Write in the present tense (e.g., "says" not "said")
- ✓ If quoting, be selective and only incorporate *important* quotes in your summary.
- ✓ If quoting, be sure to use appropriate attributive tags (see next page).
- ✓ If quoting, be sure to transfer the quote exactly (no errors!) and punctuate it correctly.
- ✓ When paraphrasing, be sure your paraphrase *accurately represents* the original ideas as expressed by your source. Never misrepresent someone's words.
- ✓ Write in your own writing style.
- ✓ Organize your summary logically so a reader can follow your thinking.
- ✓ Proofread your summary for grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors.

* Information in this handout is adapted from several sources, including *Perspectives on Contemporary Issues*, (5th ed), by Katherine Anne Ackley and *The Concise Wadsworth Handbook* (2nd ed), by Kirsner & Mandell.

Quoting Sources

When you quote, you copy a writer's statements exactly as they appear in a source, word for word and punctuation mark for punctuation mark, enclosing the borrowed material in quotation marks.

When writing a summary, it is not necessary to quote extensively. However, there may be an occasion when you wish to incorporate the exact wording or phrasing from the source you are summarizing. In those cases, it is important to provide attribution within the body of your summary. It is never appropriate to simply "drop" a quote without identifying the original author. To do this effectively, you need to use appropriate attributive tags, like "says" or "argues," depending on the context. Below is a partial list of some of the more common attributive tags. It's a good idea to vary the verbs you use to introduce a source's words instead of repeating the same one over and over again.

Common Attributive Tags for Integrating Source Material into your Writing

Acknowledges	Discloses	Notes
Suggests	Observes	Comments
Concludes	Believes	Claims
Insists	Explains	Illustrates
Predicts	Finds	Proposes
Reports	Concurs	Speculates
Warns	Affirms	Indicates
Admits	Implies	

You can vary the placement of attributive tags in your paper.

Quotation with Identifying Tag at the Beginning

As John Hostetler points out, "The Amish are successful in maintaining group identity" (53).

Quotation with Identifying Tag in the Middle

"A serious problem confronting Amish society from the viewpoint of the Amish themselves," observes Hotstetler, "is the threat of absorption into mass society through the values promoted in the public school system" (193).

Quotation with Identifying Tag at the End

"The Amish are also concerned about their children's exposure to the public school system's values," notes Hotstetler (193).

Note: parenthetical citations at the end of each of the above quotes refer to the page number where the original quotes were located. We will briefly discuss parenthetical citations later in the semester and in much more detail in English 100.