

## Writing a Reading Brief and a Summary

This semester you will read, analyze, and critique many arguments in order to better understand them and to be able to participate knowledgeably in debates about the larger issue. Each of these activities—reading, analyzing, and critiquing—is different and requires different skills and different ways of regarding the text. You must first read an argument carefully and be able to recognize the argument as the writer makes it before you can take it apart (analysis) and evaluate its effectiveness (critique). As homework at the beginning of the semester, we will do several reading briefs and summaries to get you accustomed to the first step: careful reading and accurate summary.

### The Reading Brief

The reading brief is an outline of the context and the main points of the article. It is good preparation for writing the summary, which will be in good, academic paragraph form instead of in the outline form of the reading brief. **Here's what your reading brief needs to include:**

**Description of the context of the argument:** In your textbook, most of this information is provided by Goshgarian in the paragraph that comes before the article. When you start doing your own research, you will probably have to look up the author and the publication to learn about the context on your own.

1. Who wrote the argument and what do you know about this person?
2. To whom is the author writing?
3. Where does the argument appear? Was it published elsewhere before being reprinted?
4. When was the argument written? What do you know about the time of the writing?
5. Why was the argument written? What was the author trying to accomplish?

**Summary of the argument's reasoning:** You should list the claim, reasons, and evidence **in your own words**, but be sure that you are carefully noting the author's ideas even if you disagree with them.

1. What claim or claims does the author make?
2. What reason or reasons support each claim?
3. What evidence is presented in support of each reason?

### Here's what your reading brief should look like:

- **Context:** Two to four sentences describing the author, publication, and context of the article.
- **Summary of the Argument:** This should be in outline form. Try to use complete sentences.
  - Thesis or overall argument being made
    - Claim #1 in support of the thesis
      - Reason #1 for this claim
        - Evidence for reason #1
        - Evidence for reason #1
        - Evidence for reason #1
      - Reason #2 for this claim
        - Evidence for reason #2
        - Evidence for reason #2
        - Evidence for reason #2
    - Claim #2 in support of the thesis
      - Reason #1 for this claim
      - Evidence for reason #1 (and so on)

### **The Summary**

This part should be easy once you have outlined the reading brief. Instead of being in outline form, however, this summary must be written in good academic English form, as a paragraph or series of paragraphs with helpful transitions between the paragraph parts. For the articles from your textbook, the summary should be no longer than two paragraphs.

1. Start the summary by using the sentences from the context portion of your reading brief. Tell readers the name of the article, who wrote it, where it was published, and what is significant about the context in which it was published. (But see #4 below, you may want to save the significance for the conclusion.)
2. Second, indicate the article's thesis, the author's position on the issue being written about.
3. Third, describe the article's major claims in support of the thesis and the reasons supporting each claim. Very briefly summarize the evidence that supports each reason; here is where you have to cut a lot of detail out.
4. Conclude the summary, perhaps referring to the context in which the argument was published and how the article tried to influence that context.