

## Writing a Summary and Critique Essay

The goal of writing a summary of an article, a chapter, or a book is to offer as accurately as possible the full sense of the original, but in a more condensed form. A summary restates the author's main point, purpose, intent, and supporting details in your own words.

- The process of summarizing enables you to better grasp the original, and the result shows the reader that you understand it.
- First, try to find the main idea in the reading; it's usually in the first paragraph. Next, skim through the article, glancing at any headings and graphics. Then, read the conclusion. The intent here is both to give yourself a review of the work and to effectively engage yourself with it.
- Now go back and read the original text carefully, jotting down notes on or highlighting the important points. Write the central idea and the author's reasons (purpose and intent) for holding this viewpoint. Note the supporting elements the author uses to explain or back up her/his main information or claim.
- Make an outline that includes the main idea and the supporting details. Arrange your information in a logical order, for example, most to least important or chronological. Your order need not be the same as that in the original, but keep related supporting points together. The way you organize the outline may serve as a model for how you divide and write the essay.
- Write the summary, making sure to state the author's name in the first sentence. Present the main idea, followed by the supporting points. The remainder of your summary should focus on how the author supports, defines, and/or illustrates that main idea. Remember, unless otherwise stated by your instructor, a summary should contain only the author's views, so try to be as objective as possible.
- As you revise and edit your summary, compare it to the original and ask yourself questions such as: Have I rephrased the author's words without changing their meaning? Have I restated the main idea and the supporting points accurately and in my own words?
- If you are asked to write a critical summary or to include a critique, you may want to ask yourself questions such as: Does the author succeed? How and why or why not? What are the strengths, weaknesses? Why? What did the author do well? Not well? Why?

A critique, on the other hand, analyzes, interprets, and evaluates the text, answering the questions how? why? and how well? A critique does not necessarily have to criticize the piece in a negative sense. Your reaction to the text may be largely positive, negative, or a combination of the two. It is important to explain why you respond to the text in a certain way.

### Step 1. Analyze the text

As you read the book or article you plan to critique, the following questions will help you analyze the text:

- What is the author's main point?
- What is the author's purpose?
- Who is the author's intended audience?
- What arguments does the author use to support the main point?
- What evidence does the author present to support the arguments?
- What are the author's underlying assumptions or biases?

You may find it useful to make notes about the text based on these questions as you read.

### Step 2. Evaluate the text

After you have read the text, you can begin to evaluate the author's ideas. The following questions provide some ideas to help you evaluate the text:

- Is the argument logical?
- Is the text well-organized, clear, and easy to read?
- Are the author's facts accurate?
- Have important terms been clearly defined?
- Is there sufficient evidence for the arguments?
- Do the arguments support the main point?
- Is the text appropriate for the intended audience?
- Does the text present and refute opposing points of view?
- Does the text help you understand the subject?
- Are there any words or sentences that evoke a strong response from you? What are those words or sentences? What is your reaction?
- What is the origin of your reaction to this topic? When or where did you first learn about it? Can you think of people, articles, or discussions that have influenced your views? How might these be compared or contrasted to this text?
- What questions or observations does this article suggest? That is, what does the article make you think about?

### Step 3. Plan and write your critique

Write your critique in standard essay form. It is generally best not to follow the author's organization when organizing your analysis, since this approach lends itself to summary rather than analysis. Begin with an introduction that defines the subject of your critique

and your point of view. Defend your point of view by raising specific issues or aspects of the argument. Conclude your critique by summarizing your argument and re-emphasizing your opinion.

- Offer your own opinion. Explain what you think about the argument. Describe several points with which you agree or disagree.
- For each of the points you mention, include specific passages from the text (you may summarize, quote, or paraphrase) that provide evidence for your point of view.
- Explain how the passages support your opinion.

### Concluding Your Summary Critique

Your conclusion should briefly restate your analysis of the overall validity of the author's presentation (from your critique section) and your position relative to the author's argument (from your response section). You have joined the conversation! Leave the reader with a clear sense of your evaluation of the strengths and shortcomings of the author's persuasiveness and a clear sense of your reaction to the author's position on the issue.

### Writing Your Introduction

Why write an introduction last? Many good writers do. Oftentimes we write to discover a clearer sense of our position on an issue. You may begin drafting your paper with a working thesis, which is a good idea, but your thesis may evolve as you write, as your ideas come into clearer focus. For this reason, it is probably best to delay writing your introductory paragraph until the end of the writing process, when your thesis will be fully developed and easiest to write in a clear and focused form.

Your introduction should include the following elements:

- introduction of the issue under discussion and some brief background or context explaining why the issue is important, timely, controversial, significant, etc.
- title of text and the author's name
- author's main argument (thesis)
- points of analysis you will evaluate and your overall assessment of the author's presentation (your thesis)

### Here are some questions that will help you summarize your article:

1. What is the question that the researchers are attempting to answer?
2. How does this question fit into the research that has already been done in that area? Why is it important?
3. How did the researchers answer their question? In other words, what did they do? Explain what the article was about.
4. What were their findings/results and conclusions?
5. Were their findings consistent with previous research? If not what were some of the reasons?

### Use these questions to guide you in your critique.

1. Did the researchers answer their question? Was the method of answering the question appropriate? Did the procedure make sense? Was there a better way to answer the research question?
2. Are the results consistent with the hypothesis and are they correctly interpreted? Would you interpret them any differently?
3. Are the conclusions valid and justified by the data?
4. Are the generalizations valid?