

Summaries

A summary is a brief narrative based on the content of original source material that provides an overview of the subject/issue presented in the original source material. A summary can be developed from information found in a paragraph, section of an article, whole article, story, novel, photograph, table or graph, interview, and so on. It is usually only a few sentences in length. A summary does not contain quotations (words or phrases quoted verbatim) from the original source material. A summary does not provide step-by-step details of the information presented in the original source material. Instead, the narrative of a summary conveys in an objective way a thorough description of the subject/issue presented in the original source material. To write a strong summary, you need to consider these factors:

1) the overall length of the original source material: If you are writing a summary of an article with several paragraphs, you will achieve success more readily if you first write a summary of each paragraph and then weave the summaries together to create a summary of the entire article. You can use transitional words and phrases like *first, second, third, on the other hand, conversely, in addition, furthermore* and *finally* to weave your shorter paragraph summaries together into a longer one that incorporates information from the whole article.

2) the type of original source material: If the original source material uses jargon, subject-specific language or complex sentence structures, you will write a more effective summary if you break down the language and structure into an easy-to-understand style. Provide definitions, use simple words and write in shorter sentences. Use details like dates, names and titles for clarification purposes; don't use them to impress your reader.

3) the purpose of the overall message in the original source material: This may be hard to determine. Sometimes source material is informational, while other times it may have a persuasive undertone or overtone. Still other times, source material may have an entertainment slant. The best summary states the purpose of the original source material so that the reader of the summary understands the original author's intent. This can be accomplished with the phrase "In this informational article/presentation ..." or "The author uses strong language to persuade readers about ..." or "This author uses satire/humor/parody to..."

4) your reason for writing the summary: The best summary is written in order to inform. Your summary will be most effective if it is presented factually and objectively. When you write a summary, avoid disagreeing with or challenging the ideas presented in the original source material.

5) the audience that will read your summary: Mainstream media articles often contain easy-to-understand language because their writers are trying to reach a broad audience that may not be familiar with the subject. Academic articles often use complex language and structure because academic writers are targeting a very specific audience that usually already has some knowledge of the topic. Your task as a summary writer is to determine how an audience of your peers will best be able to understand the subject you are discussing in your summary. Avoid imitating the style of the source material. Instead, use your own words and your own style to create the most effective summary.

Summary writing can be beneficial during research because it can help you to understand the message in articles on which you want to base your essay. Summary writing can also be beneficial during essay writing because it can be used to present someone else's idea in a factual and objective way. It may seem like extra work to write a summary for each paragraph of an article you have read or researched, but that little bit of writing can be useful in the long run.

Today's in-class activity involves writing summaries of three of the presentations you heard in class on Monday. Here is an example of a summary based on a presentation heard in a previous class.

PRESENTATION: My name is Lars Ender. This is my second year at Johnson County. I'm studying music. I want to be a music teacher eventually. Well, a marching band director.... I brought my trumpet. I've been playing trumpet since I was 8. Not this trumpet. I have had this trumpet for just a couple of years. I bought it in high school because my other trumpet got dropped and the tuning slide got bent up and couldn't be fixed. It fell off a chair – actually, somebody knocked it off the chair during an orchestra rehearsal – and the guy at the music store said I'd be better off buying a new trumpet than trying to fix the damage. They may look sturdy, but they get bent up just like any metal thing. Anyway, so this is my trumpet. It's a B-flat trumpet, which means that it matches up with the pitch of a B-flat scale on a piano. There are other types of trumpets out there, but I've always liked the way the B-flat one sounds. Like I said, I've been playing since I was a little kid, but it wasn't until high school that I decided I wanted to be a music teacher because I really liked the whole marching band thing. Our school's band, the Screamin' Eagles, got a first Division Rating at the Central States Marching Band event at K-State in 2009 and took first place in our class – 4A – at the Missouri Western Tournament of Champions competition in 2009. That's when I decided that I wanted to study music so I could be a marching band director. I like the whole combination of movement, precision, sound, being outside, planning— I think all that stuff is great, and I want to be a part of it. And Mr. Love, my band leader, is a great band director and mentor. He has really done a lot to inspire the kids in band to get involved. So, that's it. This is my trumpet.

SUMMARY: Lars Ender is a music major at Johnson County Community College. He has been playing the trumpet since he was 8 years old and has performed in school orchestras and an award-winning marching band. Lars plans to pursue a career as a marching band teacher.

Or more simply:

SUMMARY: Lars Ender, a music major at Johnson County Community College, was so inspired by his childhood experiences as a trumpet player that he plans to pursue a career as a marching band director.

Here's a second presentation. Write a summary about this student's presentation.

My name is Emma Hays. I'm going on my third year at JCCC. I'm a horticulture major. My family owns a farm down by Gardner and I've always been around animals and plants. I decided to study horticulture because I like gardening and trees, and I want to own a nursery some day. I couldn't bring my favorite tree so I brought one of my houseplants.

It's a Venus flytrap. It grows naturally in wet, swampy places, like in Florida and along the eastern coast of the U.S. It wouldn't survive in the wild around here because the weather gets too cold, but lots of places sell flytraps as houseplants and novelties. I keep mine in a window greenhouse thing that we have in our kitchen. Venus flytraps actually eat flies and spiders and

other little bugs, using the minerals they get from the insects to help them grow. I'll show you. If I touch these little trigger hairs around the edges of this pair of oval-shaped pads, or lobes, the way a bug would if it landed on the plant, the pads will come together and close, trapping the bug inside. Then the lobes secrete enzymes that eventually break down the body of the trapped bug. It takes a week or more for the flytrap to "digest" a bug, and then it reopens to catch something else that lands on the plant.

So, this is one reason why I want to own a nursery. I love working with plants. I love how plants are different and unique and how plant breeders are able to come up with new varieties that look prettier or more colorful or more interesting than their plant parents. When I was about 10, my mom and I started growing bearded irises – they're a type of flower on a long stalk and they have brightly colored, ruffly petals – in a plot in our back yard. I've developed a new variety in a shade of reddish purple that doesn't look like any other variety on the market right now. I would like to be able to offer new varieties of different plants to customers at my nursery. And I would also sell Venus flytraps.

SUMMARY: _____

Your Name:
Instructor's Name:
Course:
Date:

Summary Writing: A Worksheet

In the spaces below, write three summaries based on the presentations you heard in class on Monday. If you need additional information (such as spelling of the student's name, spelling of the object he or she brought to class, dates or other details he or she mentioned that you didn't get written down completely), ask the student for this information before you start writing so that your notes are as complete as possible. Turn in your notes and summaries at the end of class.

Summary #1

Presenter's name _____

SUMMARY: _____

Summary #2

Presenter's name _____

SUMMARY: _____

Summary #3

Presenter's name _____

SUMMARY: _____
