

THE SUMMARY AND REACTION

The summary and reaction is one of the most common assignments given in college. It requires you to identify and react to the key points in a text. From literature to psychology to health services to criminal justice and across the spectrum of classes, in-between the summary and response is an essential, indispensable aspect of your education.

THE SUMMARY:

Definition:

A summary is a rewritten, shortened version of a piece of writing in which you use your own wording to express the main ideas.

A summary not only demonstrates your comprehension of the material covered, but the process of translating someone else's words into your own helps you to better understand the text and retain the information longer.

Why?

The process of reading with the intent to summarize forces you, as the reader, to discriminate among the ideas presented, deciding which are the most important. This makes you an active reader, again reinforcing the essential information.

On the Process:

- ◆ The process of active reading will help you to distinguish what information should be included in your summary (and provide you with a working outline from which to compose your paper). By highlighting, underlining, and annotating the text as you read, not only will you be able to refer back to the text easily, you will retain more information for a longer period of time, and you will have a working outline for your summary.
- ◆ First, read the text and highlight what you feel to be the most important ideas. Ask yourself what the text is really about? What do you feel a reader must take away from this reading? Don't highlight entire sentences. Concentrate on just a few words in each sentence that sum up the meaning. This practice will help prevent you from accidentally highlighting the entire page.
- ◆ Second, look at what you have highlighted, and underline what information of that portion is the **most** important. This will help you hone in on the most essential information. Remember, a summary is generally about 1/3 the length of the original text.
- ◆ Finally, as you read over what you have highlighted and underlined, pretend you are explaining what the reading is about to a friend. What would you say the reading was about? As you think about this, jot down a few ideas in the margins of the text. Don't worry about complete sentences; just write a few words to remind you what each

paragraph was about. This begins the process of putting the author's ideas/argument into your own words.

- ◆ If you have worked this three step process, you now have a rough outline from which to compose your summary--the underlined key ideas and highlighted details as well as the beginnings of your summary in the margins. All you have to do is begin to translate this information into your own words. Refer to the rules listed below, paying close attention to your language. Summaries should be direct and concise.

Rules to Guide You:

1. Cite the author and title of the text towards the beginning of the summary.
2. Reduce the length of the original by about two-thirds, although the exact reduction will vary, depending on the content of the original.
3. Concentrate on the main ideas and include details only infrequently.
4. Change the original wording without changing the idea.
5. DO NOT EVALUATE THE CONTENT OR GIVE AN OPINION IN ANY WAY. The summary is not the forum to either agree or disagree with the content of the original text. Save this for the reaction.
6. DO NOT ADD IDEAS TO THE AUTHOR'S.
7. DO NOT INCLUDE ANY PERSONAL COMMENTS (that is, do not use "I", referring to self).
8. Use quotations only infrequently. (If you do use quotations, however, enclose them in quotation marks.)
9. Use the present tense (sometimes referred to as the historical present tense) to summarize the argument presented in the original text. ("Kelley contends that there is no such thing as the Moon. It is, in fact, the back of the sun.")
10. Use some author tags ("says Kelley," "according to Kelley," or "the author explains") to remind the reader that you are summarizing the material of another author.

Writing:

- ◆ Begin with a statement of the author and title of the work, followed by a restatement of the author's thesis using your own words.
- ◆ Divide the source text into its major sections, and then compose a sentence or two that sums up the content of each section. Refer to the underlined/highlighted material, as well as your notes in the margins of the text to guide you through this process.
- ◆ Put the pieces together by adding, in order, your summaries of each major section.
- ◆ Revise and polish your summary by adding transitions so the summary reads smoothly, omitting any repetitions or minor details.

Adapted from:

Brandon, Kelly, and Lee Brandon. *Paragraphs and Essays with Integrated Readings*. Wadsworth Cengage, 2011, pp16-18.

THE REACTION

The Reaction is a text-based response in which you incorporate your views on the source text. A reaction requires you to **analyze the content of the text critically, evaluate the validity of the argument presented**, and sometimes, relate the source text to your own personal experience.

Process:

- ◆ To begin, review the information you highlighted, underlined, and annotated upon your initial readings of the source material.
- ◆ Reread the key elements to the author's argument and look inwards. A reaction/response paper is not about how you feel or whether you like or dislike the text; however, the answers to these questions can and will help direct your analysis of the text by fueling your approach. If you didn't like the reading, examine why you didn't like it. Was the author's style distracting? Abrasive? Did the author jump to ill-founded conclusions? If you liked the reading, why did you like it? Did you agree with the position? Was it well-written? Use your emotions as the basis from which to build a fair and accurate argument.

Fueling the Response

Consider the following:

- ◆ What is the main problem or issue that the author is addressing?
- ◆ What is the author saying about this problem/issue?
- ◆ What evidence/examples are presented?
- ◆ What assumptions does the author make? Are they well-founded?
- ◆ How did this reading make you feel?
- ◆ What response, in you, did it provoke?
- ◆ Do you agree with the author's argument?
- ◆ Do you disagree?
- ◆ Do you agree with some points but disagree with others?
- ◆ Why do you feel this way?
- ◆ Did you like the reading?
- ◆ Did you dislike it?
- ◆ Why?
- ◆ If you were the author of this piece, what would you have done differently?

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- ◆ Was the reading interesting? Was it boring? What could the author have done better to more effectively present his/her argument?
- ◆ Play Devil's Advocate, and take a position opposite from that which the author believes. Does this change your impression of the text?
- ◆ What aspect of the reading stood out the most?
- ◆ What was the weakest part of the author's argument? How could they do it better?
- ◆ What do you already know about this topic? How did this information influence your reading of the text?
- ◆ Was this reading easy? Was it hard? Why?
- ◆ What did this reading remind you of? Another book? A television show or movie? An essay? An article? An event from your own life?
- ◆ What could this reading tell you about your own experiences? Can you relate to anything mentioned in the text? Why? If not, why?

Making Sense of It:

1. Identify the question that provoked the strongest response from you. What from the reading made you feel this way? What from the reading might support your opinion?
2. Are there any other responses that seem somehow related to the first? Can you draw connections between your answers? Can you support these opinions with information from the text? From your life? From another source?
3. Can you think of examples you have read about, heard about, seen, lived, experienced to support your opinion?
4. How did you arrive at this conclusion?

Ultimately, a well-developed response is specific and offers **clear, definite examples** (either from the original text or an outside, authoritative source) that **support claims made in your analysis of the reading**.

Prove why your analysis/argument is the right one.

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