

Writing a Summary

A **summary** is condensed version of a larger reading. A summary is not a rewrite of the original piece and does not have to be long nor should it be long. To write a summary, use your own words to express briefly the main idea and relevant details of the piece you have read. Your purpose in writing the summary is to give the basic ideas of the original reading. What was it about and what did the author want to communicate?

While reading the original work, take note of what or who is the focus and ask the usual questions that reporters use: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? Using these questions to examine what you are reading can help you to write the summary.

Sometimes, the central idea of the piece is stated in the introduction or first paragraph, and the supporting ideas of this central idea are presented one by one in the following paragraphs. Always read the introductory paragraph thoughtfully and look for a thesis statement. Finding the thesis statement is like finding a key to a locked door. Frequently, however, the thesis, or central idea, is implied or suggested. Thus, you will have to work harder to figure out what the author wants readers to understand. Use any hints that may shed light on the meaning of the piece: pay attention to the title and any headings and to the opening and closing lines of paragraphs.

In writing the summary, let your reader know the piece that you are summarizing. Identify the title, author and source of the piece. You may want to use this formula:

In "Title of the Piece" (source and date of piece), author shows that: central idea of the piece. The author supports the main idea by using _____ and showing that

_____.

Here is a sample summary:

In the short story "[The Secret Life of Walter Mitty](#)," author James Thurber humorously presents a character who fantasizes about himself as a hero enduring incredibly challenging circumstances. In his real life, Walter Mitty lives an ordinary, plain life; he is a husband under the control of an overbearing, critical wife. Thurber uses lively dialogue to give readers an understanding of Mitty's character. The story takes place over a period of about twenty minutes; during this brief time, Mitty drives his wife to the hairdresser and runs errands that his wife has given him while he waits for her. In between his worrying that he is not doing what she wants him to do, he daydreams about himself as a great surgeon, brilliant repair technician, expert marksman, and brave military captain. This story shows that fantasy is often a good alternative to reality.

Remember:

- Do not rewrite the original piece.
- Keep your summary short.
- Use your own wording.
- Refer to the central and main ideas of the original piece.
- Read with who, what, when, where, why and how questions in mind.
- Do not put in your opinion of the issue or topic discussed in the original piece. Often, instructors ask students to put their opinions in a paragraph separate from the summary.

[Read "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" by James Thurber](#)

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