



Figure 1 Figure 1 The Writing Center and Academic Resource Center logo

WRITING A SUMMARY

A summary is a condensed version of a piece of writing; it presents the main idea and key support points, stripping down the information to the essential elements.

PRE-READING: The process of writing a summary starts before you start reading.

“There is a great deal that you can determine about a source before you actually read it. To get a sense of it, you should check all of its standard features, as if they were clues.”

– Irene L. Clark, *Understanding World Conflict Through Writing*

1. ORIENT YOURSELF WITH A QUICK OVERVIEW

- Notice the title of the article/essay; what is the subject and context?
- Notice the author’s name and biographical information or introductory comments. Is the author well known in any particular way?
- Note publication information; name and type of publication, date, etc.
- Notice graphic devices: title, headline, sub-heads; these give structural clues and show the emphasis on aspects of content.
- MAKE A PREDICTION! From just this basic identifying data, and a quick look at the opening paragraph, ask yourself what you THINK the article is about. Start reading, keeping your prediction in mind, and notice to what extent your prediction is borne out and to what extent it is not. This allows you to interact with the text.

2. READ AGAIN, TAKING NOTES

- Jot down the FIVE W’s: Who, What, Why, Where, When (and How.)
- Write down key names or figures that you will need to record accurately.

3. NOW, PUT YOUR MATERIAL AWAY, AND WRITE IN YOUR OWN WORDS WHAT THE ARTICLE WAS ABOUT.

Here's a good method: Pretend you are picking up the telephone to tell a friend about the article. Just use your regular conversational tone and tell it like it is...briefly, with emphasis on what is important, and the impact that article might have on them. Then, write it just like you said it, and revise and edit later.

1. Give the article's title, author and publication information.
2. Give a brief sentence describing the main point of the article.
3. Give examples that are used developing the main point of the article.
4. Always try to put it into *your own words*.

WHAT NOT TO DO IN A SUMMARY

- Do not paraphrase the entire passage; that is, do not rewrite it by rephrasing it word for word.
- Do not combine just the topic sentence of most of the paragraphs or string together a series of quotations. Neither method gives all of the important ideas of a passage.
- Do not make your summary a collection of the notes you take as you read. Taking notes is one of the steps in preparing a summary, but these notes do not show the way the ideas are related to each other in the original. Your summary should show this relationship.
- Do not include any unimportant information. Leave out most short narratives and details.
- Do not write, "The author says . . ." or "The author believes . . ." Try not to use the author's exact phrases. Instead, put the ideas in your own words. However, if you must use the author's exact words, put them within quotation marks.
- Do not make critical comments like, "This article does not give enough examples" unless the instructor wants them.

From STRATEGIES AND STRUCTURES: A BASIC WRITING GUIDE by Mary S. Spangler and Rita R. Werner

AVOIDING PLAGIARISM AND CLOSE PARAPHRASING

Keep the following in mind when working on the rough drafts of your summary:

- Express the author's ideas in your own words. Do not imitate the original work or stay too close to its style.
- Do not use expressions like "the author says." Equally important, do not introduce your own opinion into the summary; that is, don't make comments like "another good point made by the author." Instead, concentrate on presenting the author's ideas directly and briefly.

From English Skills by John Langan

AVOIDING CLOSE PARAPHRASES

- ORIGINAL VERSION

If the existence of a signing ape was unsettling for linguists, it was also startling news for animal behaviorists. --Davis, *Eloquent Animals*, p.26

- UNACCEPTABLE BORROWING OF WORDING

The existence of a signing ape unsettled linguists and startled animal behaviorists.

- UNACCEPTABLE BORROWING OF STRUCTURE

If the presence of a sign-language-using chimp was disturbing for scientists studying language, it was also surprising to scientists studying animal behavior.

- ACCEPTABLE PARAPHRASES

According to Flora Davis, linguists and animal behaviorists were unprepared for the news that a chimp could communicate with its trainers through sign language.

When they learned of an ape's ability to use sign language, both linguists and animal behaviorists were taken by surprise (Davis 26).

From The Bedford Handbook For Writers

Exercise:

The following is a sample article for the summary exercise.

October 3, 2003, Friday

*The Final Frontier: Queens; **Museum's Rockets***

Return After a Tuneup in Ohio

By COREY KILGANNON

You can see a lot of strange things on a New York City street, but on Wednesday night there was something almost literally out of this world. Two extra-long flatbed trucks rumbled into Manhattan looking as if they had made a wrong turn at Cape Canaveral. Each truck carried a vintage rocket built four decades ago to soar into space, a voyage that some days seems less difficult than a trip across Midtown.

The rockets -- an Atlas and a Titan 2, each roughly 100 feet long -- had been refurbished in Ohio and were being brought back to be reinstalled outside the New York Hall of Science, on the western edge of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in Queens.

Getting there required taking a lengthy and windy route through Manhattan and Brooklyn.

"Oh, New York was definitely the roughest part of the two-day trip," said Frank Corsaro, 47, who drove the truck carrying the Titan. "We had traffic and cabbies cutting us off. People were actually stopping us asking if these were nuclear missiles for the war. It was ridiculous."

The rockets were first installed at the Hall of Science as an exhibit in the United States Space Park for the 1964 World's Fair, and eventually became a prime attraction of the Hall of Science.

But over the years they became decrepit, filthy and infested with pigeons. By the 1990's, they were more faded kitsch than gleaming majestic testaments to the boldness of the space age. Their frameworks had deteriorated and the rockets were structurally unsound, said the Hall of Science's director, Alan J. Friedman.

The two rockets, which are essentially empty shells without their fuel tanks, are supported by internal frames for exhibition. "The Atlas actually had a wooden interior frame that had become infested with termites," Dr. Friedman said. "We considered donating them to an aviation museum, but the people of New York have such an affection for the rockets, we realized that couldn't happen."

In 2001, they were removed and trucked to Akron, Ohio, for a \$2 million restoration job by Thomarios, a specialty construction company. Workers built and installed new frames and foundations so the rockets would no longer need wires for support and could withstand winds up to 125 miles per hour.

Workers also replaced many exterior panels on the spacecraft and power-washed them before applying paint and coating to protect them.

Both rockets were made for the Air Force in 1961 to carry nuclear warheads, said Louis Chinal, a space historian from Staten Island who was hired as a consultant on the project.

Instead, NASA acquired them to put astronauts into orbit under the Mercury and Gemini space programs. They were never used and ended up being donated for display at the World's Fair.

The Titan rocket has a mock fiberglass flight capsule, but the Atlas rocket was equipped by NASA with an original Mercury flight capsule

used atop another rocket in a short unmanned flight in 1960 in Virginia to test an escape mechanism. During the recent refurbishment, that capsule was removed for display at the center, and a fiberglass replica has replaced it on the rocket.

Dr. Friedman called the rockets "a visual symbol of science and technology."

"They bring back for another generation the excitement a lot of us felt for the space program," he said. "These have always grabbed the attention of children and adults whose greatest dream is to blast off to another universe. They are visible and visceral and proof that science can be big and beautiful and even dangerous."

The rockets were reinstalled yesterday in their familiar spot next to the center. A crane lifted both rockets, now strengthened and shiny, off the flatbeds and onto sturdy new bases.

The Atlas, 93 feet of stainless steel, was guided onto its 10-foot-high platform as a group of onlookers in lawn chairs cheered. Then the Titan, with its new black, white and gray paint job, was installed.

"They're back, the twin towers of Queens," said Bob Lantier, 50, who lives near the center. "I grew up with these rockets. They're like family. I missed them every day they were away."

The Hall of Science is undergoing a \$68 million, five-year expansion. As the crane lifted the Titan near the center's new 55,000-square-foot addition yesterday, gusts of wind made the rocket swing back and forth.

The scene inspired awe in Jonas Toleikis, 6, a first grader from Manhattan, who mused that the

rockets could take him "to outer space to see stars and stuff."

Elijah Wood, 7, a second grader from Port Washington, N.Y., said the experience made him want to become an astronaut.

His mother, Laura Kaye, 45, said she brought him because "my father brought me here when I was his age, and I wanted to give my son the same thing."

Exercise:

Compare the following paragraphs, and determine which is an effective summary and which is a problematic summary. Next, underline the sections that need revising, and make the necessary corrections.

On one such Wednesday night there was something almost literally out of this world; you could see a lot of strange things on the New York City streets. This article is about two rockets Atlas and Titan being dragged into Manhattan, even though people thought "they made a wrong turn at Cape Canaveral." The rockets were first installed in New York City in the Hall of Science in 1964, where they became a prime attraction, but as the years drew on they became decrepit, structurally unsound, filthy and infested with pigeons. They got so badly undone, for example, the interior of the Atlas was infested with termites, that they were almost donated to a different sight. But the people of New York cherished them, I think, maybe because they became symbols of a great age in America, our desire to explore the unknown; who wouldn't love the rockets? But then the rockets got restored with a 2 million dollar paint job, and were installed as the "Twin Tower" symbols of Queens.

Corey Kilgannon's article "Museum's Rockets Return After a Tuneup in Ohio," published in the New York Times on October 3, 2003, discusses the return of two rockets to the New York Hall of Science after a two-year absence. According to the article, the Air Force made the rockets, Atlas and Titan, in the early 60's, and NASA donated them to the city of New York. In 2001, the rockets were given to Thomarios, a company in Ohio, for \$2 million dollars worth of restoration. A crowd watched the reinstallation of the huge rockets, both of which were over ninety feet. The restoration insured that a whole new generation would enjoy the sight of the rockets, which have been a part of New York's history for the last four decades.

This handout is based on the following books:

Clark, Irene L. Understanding World conflict Through Writing. Pearson custom Publishing, 2003.

Hacker, Diane. The Bedford Handbook for Writers. 4th ed. Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

Langan, John. English Skills. Boston: MacGraw-Hill, 1997.

Spangler, Mary S. and Rita R. Werner, Strategies and Structures: A Basic Writing Guide. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1989.

For further reference, see the following books:

Anker, Susan. Real Writing. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001.

Hacker, Diana. A Writer's Reference. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999.

All of the above texts are available in The Writing Center.

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