I. **What is a Summary?**

A summary is a brief statement in your own words of the **main point** and the **significant supporting details** about something you have read. Do not include your opinion. Within the first paragraph, you should state the main point or thesis, and subsequent sentences should incorporate the significant details. Pay particular attention to the five W’s: who, what, when, where and why. Minor details and irrelevant details should be deleted. A summary should be in paragraph form, and, obviously, be considerably shorter than the material you are discussing. The usual ration is 3:1; thus, a *three page* article could be summarized in approximately *one page*.

II. **Why Summarize?**

Summarizing is an essential skill when writing research papers. Using your own words and putting the essence of an article(s) into concise sentences requires a thorough understanding of the material. As one researcher noted, “Since so much summarizing is necessary for writing papers, students should have the skill before starting work on research papers. How much plagiarism is the result of inadequate summarizing skills?” And, it should be noted, plagiarism, or “kidnapping” another’s work, is considered a serious academic offense.

Writing a research paper may mean that you will have to read several articles and/or books as you collect data. Carefully take enough notes so you can write your paper without returning to the library for another look at the original references. Your summary will combine the important details of your selected topic.

As you read take notes which highlight the main focus of the book. Be sure to write down page numbers within your note taking process, so you can go back and reread certain sections that you consider to be important. You may want to quote from one or more of them to prove your stance on the author’s message.

You may be asked to summarize a chapter or an entire textbook. The basic premise is to pinpoint the main idea and important details. Again, summarizing is a shortened version of the original written matter showing that you understand the author’s main point/theme.
III. **How to Summarize**

A. Keep in mind the purpose of your summary. Your focus will determine which details are important and how many should be included.

B. Decide on the main point the author(s) is trying to convey and put this main point in the first paragraph of your summary.

C. Decide on the major ideas and details that support the author’s point. Include these ideas in your summary and as many of the significant supporting details as your purpose demands, keeping in mind this is a “summary.”

D. Do not include irrelevant or repeated information in your summary.

E. Write the summary in your own words. DO NOT PLAGIARIZE. Check a dictionary for any difficult words used by the author before you use them.

Originally compiled by Carol Ruecker