

Organizing Information VI: Summarizing

Students sometimes feel overwhelmed by the large amount of new information presented in their classrooms and textbooks.

- The first step in handling a large amount of information is to reduce the material to its most important parts, by deciding what is important, less important, and unimportant.
- The second step is to organize the important information so that it is easy to study.
 - For help with the first step, see Organizing Information I – III.
 - For help with the second step, see Organizing Information IV – VI.

What is a Summary?

A summary condenses an author's ideas or arguments into your own words. A summary contains only the major ideas of a selection of text without very much background information or supporting details.

After you are sure you understand the given material, use the following tips to write a good summary:

1. First, highlight or take brief notes on the material.
2. Write one sentence that sums up the writer's overall concern or main idea.
3. Be sure to write in your own words, rather than copying the author.
4. Review the supporting details the author uses to explain the main idea. Include only the details you need for your summary.
5. Summaries usually present the main ideas of the author in the same order that they appear in the original text.
6. If the writer emphasizes something important, make sure to include the same material in your summary.
7. If you are doing the summary for your own use, don't worry about format or grammar.

A good summary can take several pages of text and condense it down into maybe one or two pages of essential information. Once you have a good summary, you can always review it in preparation for tests or class discussions.