

Writing Summaries

What a Summary Is

A summary is a brief overview of an author's main ideas expressed in your own words. It is a **comprehensive, shorter, and paraphrased version** of the important points. You want to condense the crucial points in an organized manner. It is your understanding of the text.

What a Summary is Not

A summary is *not* an opinionated or disorderly retelling of the author's main ideas. You want to stay away from mimicking the author. Therefore, direct quotations should not appear in your summary. Do not use whole phrases from the original. Your summary should also not exceed the length of the original content. A summary will not include every detail or event, but only key points.

Preparation for Summarizing

Writing a summary requires you to find the key ideas from the material. There are a variety of media that you may summarize, from articles and short videos to novels and full-length films. Do the following as you prepare to summarize:

- Ensure that you **understand** *the major components* of the text you are reading. You may have to **break down** *the material* to **comprehend** it accurately.
- **Annotate** or *highlight main ideas* from the source.
- **Keep in mind the summary length you must write.** Is it more than one page? A single paragraph? Or multiple paragraphs?
- Remember to **remain objective** in summarizing; you should not give your own opinion or argue or agree with the author. You are simply expressing the key points of the text.
- **Avoid looking at the original as you write** your summary. It's easy to fall into the trap of using whole phrases or even quoting the original when trying to summarize if you are looking at it while you write. Put it away, and in your own words, write a summary.

The Do's of Summarizing

- **Cover** the *overall* topic
- **Address** the *author* and *title*
Example: In the article, "*Effective Ways to Write a Summary*," *Professor Ron Moore states...*
- **Write** in the *present tense* (explains, claims, states, etc...)
- **Restate** the *main ideas* from the author
- **Use** *reporting verbs* (observes, describes, discusses, etc...)
- **Refer to the source** to make sure *all information stated is accurate*
- **Include** *crucial points* without giving all the details

The Do Not's of Summarizing

- **Do not include** your *own opinions or quotes* from the author
- **Avoid** *whole phrases from the original text*
- **Do not include** *more than the key points and essential information*
- **Do not write** *more than the original text*

Examples of Summarizing

Below is a **paragraph** summary of the short story, *The Gift of the Magi*:

The Gift of the Magi is a short Christmas tale that recounts the event of Della and Jim's Christmas presents for each other. The beginning of the story follows Della as she expresses anxiety over finding Jim a present with only \$1.87. She decides to sell her hair, her most valued feature, to afford his present. She chooses a gold chain to go perfectly with his family heirloom watch. Della then anxiously waits for Jim to return home. Once he arrives home, Della stresses to him that her hair will grow back and that she sold it so she can afford his Christmas present. However, Jim is not concerned about her hair at all; he thinks she is still beautiful. He is only surprised because he sold his family heirloom watch so that he could buy the bejeweled combs Della has been eyeing. The two no longer have their most valued possessions, but their personal sacrifices denote unconditional love in their hearts.

Below is a **one sentence summary** of the short story, *The Gift of the Magi*:

The Gift of the Magi is a Christmas tale about a couple, Della, and Jim, selling their most valued possessions to buy each other a gift that is perfect for the other's now missing valued possession.