

**A summary presents the main idea of an article or book, but it uses a condensed form that can range from a few words to several pages in length.** Movie or TV program guide descriptions are examples of very short summaries. For instance, the movie *Titanic* might be summarized as, “Ship hits iceberg and sinks.” However, **most summaries are at least one paragraph and frequently one to two pages long.** Summaries are used extensively in the business world to summarize events, such as a seminar or training session; a large report, such as an environmental impact statement; or the results of a process, such as an investigation. During your college years, professors will help you to develop the techniques of summarizing by asking you to condense magazine articles or book chapters. The following suggestions should help you to prepare a comprehensive summary.

## PREPARING TO WRITE

### **Read the material several times.**

Read the article at least two or three times, the first time to understand the general content, and the second to begin making notes.

### **Look for the thesis statement.**

All well-written works contain a thesis statement. The thesis statement is near the beginning of the document, usually within the first three paragraphs. **Be sure to identify the thesis statement for the entire document, not the topic sentence for one paragraph.**

### **Make a list of details that support the thesis statement.**

Authors will use supporting details or examples to prove the thesis. **You may include as many supporting details as desired, but you should include, as a minimum, the three most important.**

### **Organize your material into paragraphs.**

**As a rule of thumb, summaries less than 200 words may be written in one paragraph, but if they are over 200 words, they should be divided into two paragraphs.** A two-paragraph summary might be organized with the summary in the first paragraph and your reaction in the second paragraph.

## WRITING THE SUMMARY

### **State the author, title, date, and topic.**

**The first sentence of the first paragraph should state the author, title, date (magazines and newspapers), and the general topic.** In a short summary, the main idea might be included in the first sentence, but it is acceptable to state the main idea in the second sentence. Incorporate this information into an interesting sentence. Your first sentence should get your reader’s attention.

**Example:** In the May/June 1997 issue of *American History*, Shannon Moon Leonetti reveals that for more than fifty years Charley Parkhurst, a “hard-bitten” stage coach driver, concealed the fact that he was a woman. In “Charley’s Secret” Leonetti has reconstructed the known facts of Charley (Charlotte) Parkhurst’s life.

In this example, the first two sentences contain the information that is required in a summary, and the information is woven into the sentences in an interesting manner.

Date	Magazine Title	Author
In the <b>May/June 1997</b>	issue of <i><b>American History</b></i> ,	<b>Shannon Moon Leonetti</b>
	Main Idea	
that for more than fifty years	<b>Charlie Parkhurst</b> ,	a “hard-bitten” stage coach driver,
	Main Idea	Article Title
concealed the fact that he <b>was a woman</b> .	In “ <b>Charley’s Secret</b> ” Leonetti has reconstructed	
the known facts of Charley (Charlotte) Parkhurst’s life.		

**Use proper format and reference conventions.**

The titles of long works are underlined or written in italics. The titles of short works or works that are a part of the entire document are enclosed in quotation marks. Notice in the above example how this distinction makes it easy for the reader to understand that *American History* is the title of a magazine (italics) and that “Charley’s Secret” (quotation marks) is the title of an article within that magazine.

**State the full name of the author the first time you use it. In future references to the author, use the author’s last name, or full name, but never the first name alone.** Notice in the above example how the second sentence uses the phrase “. . . Leonetti has reconstructed . . .” as a reference to the author.

**Incorporate the details into the paragraph.**

**In a two-paragraph summary, the author’s supporting details are incorporated into the first paragraph.** If the author included many supporting facts, select the three most important to include in your summary.

**Use your own words to present the author’s points or ideas, although you may want to quote a phrase or single sentence from the author’s writing to illustrate an idea. Be sure to use quotation marks around the quoted material.**

State the author’s points clearly and honestly. Do not include your opinion or comments about the author’s ideas.

**Write your opinion.**

**In a two-paragraph summary, the second paragraph contains your opinion.** You might want to state the author’s points with which you agree or disagree and provide reasons for your views. You may also comment on the author’s style (difficult/easy to understand), the author’s understanding of the subject matter, the article’s length, or the vocabulary level. In general, it is also acceptable to relate the author’s main point to your personal experience, but it may not be acceptable to your professor. You should ask your professor if relating a personal experience is appropriate to the assignment.