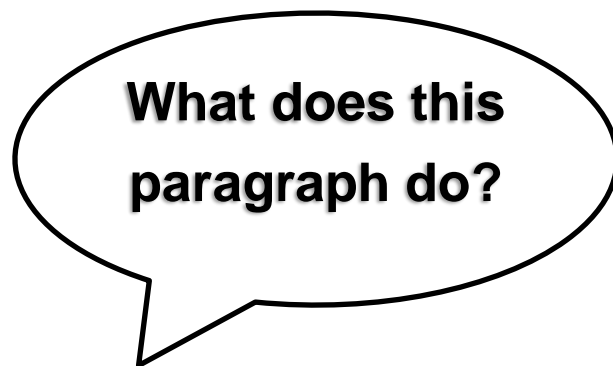


Summary Writing

When writing **abstracts, reviews, annotations, or reports**, you must concisely summarize information found in the original document and often take what is presented by another author/other authors and **express it in your own words**. This requirement seems reasonably straightforward, but many students have difficulties in determining **how much of the original content** should be included in the summary. The process described below can mitigate this problem.

Step 1: Read the document you want to summarize while focusing only on **understanding the author's ideas**. Take **no notes** at this stage, and try not to focus on particular details. Your singular interest at this point is to gain a **comprehensive view** of the article as a whole.

Step 2: Read the document again, but this time **focus more on the details**. Specifically, categorize each paragraph in the text by asking the question:



Note: The question is not “What does this paragraph say?” If you ask this question of each paragraph, you will summarize everything. So first you must determine **what role** each paragraph has in contributing to the full text.

What Can a Paragraph Do?

- Identify the general topic
- State the author's position/thesis
- Provide background information
- Pose a research question
- Establish context for an example
- Set up a bridge between two ideas
- Explain a major point of evidence
- Explain a minor or sub-point of evidence
- Connect one point to another, secondary point
- Conclude an argument

Some of the roles listed above are not usually important enough to include in a summary. However, depending on the **circumstances** and the **discipline**, you will have to use your best judgment to determine which of those roles should be included.

Step 3: By process of elimination, go through your list of paragraph roles for the document you are summarizing and **cross out any paragraphs** with content that is unimportant to the major ideas in the original text.

Example:

Paragraph 1 – This paragraph tells a short story to provide background information.

Paragraph 2 – This paragraph explains the author’s main argument.

Paragraph 3 – This paragraph picks up the thread of the story from the first paragraph.

Paragraph 4 – This paragraph offers a statistic that backs up the argument.

Then, for those paragraphs you keep, you can write a few sentences summarizing what they say, only more succinctly.

Step 4: At this stage, you write an initial draft of your summary. Do not be too concerned with length requirements at this point, as you will almost certainly have to **revise the draft** to condense the writing and eliminate unnecessary content.

Stylistically, it is permissible (and sometimes even preferred) if you are **conventional in your writing**. For this reason, consider drafting an opening sentence that includes as many of the following components as possible:

- The title of the text
- The date of publication
- The author’s name
- The source
- The general topic
- The author’s thesis

