Summary Writing

Summary writing is a foundational skill supporting loftier goals, such as analysis of a text, reaction to a concept, or comparing and contrasting an issue. Unless comprehension and retention take place in dealing with a text, a student’s further exploration of the text will be faulty. Summary writing is essential to a student’s ability to “lock in” essential comprehension and retention for further use.

Summary writing should be objective: “just the facts.” Analysis, argument, and reactions need to follow. The true art of summary writing is to distill only the essential facts, rather than attempting to log every detail. As a stepping stone toward explication and insight, summary writing is critical to the writing process and occurs in the earliest stages of essay development.

Preparation (This is the hard part!!!)

1. A good summary presents the thesis of the article and the support for it. The summary should include the main idea of each paragraph in the article, essay, or book.
2. The summary should be written in your own words and demonstrate a clear understanding of the work being summarized.
3. The length of a summary should be 30-50% the length of the source.
4. Direct quotations and paraphrasing should be used very sparingly. Only use them when absolutely necessary to present an idea clearly.
5. A careful reading of the material is essential. Underline the thesis and hi-light or underline the supporting information.
6. Without looking at the source, write the thesis in your own words.
7. Without looking at the source, write one or two sentences to summarize each paragraph if you are summarizing a short work. For a longer work write one or two sentences for each group of supporting paragraphs.

Writing the Summary

1. In your first sentence indicate that you are writing a summary. Include the name of the source and the author.
2. Using your summaries of the thesis and supporting paragraphs (#6 & 7 above), write the final summary.
3. Check that you have written in your own words. Be sure that you make clear transitions. Indicate the relationship between ideas with transitional words.
4. Check that you have not omitted any important information.
5. Cite the source at the end.

Howard, Rebecca Moore. *Writing Matters.* 2nd ed. New York*:* McGraw-Hill, 2014. Print.