

WRITING A SUMMARY, RESPONSE, OR CRITIQUE

Summary. A condensed version of an original presentation that

- identifies the original author by name,
- identifies the context for the original presentation, and
- states the original author's main idea and major points

Response. Describes and explains your *intellectual* response to the original author's presentation. The response may include one or more of the following:

- how the original author's ideas compare to the ideas of other experts.
- whether or not the original presentation contained logical flaws or misinformation.
- whether or not the author responded to other points of view on the subject.
- how the author's ideas might be applied or how they might change a situation if they were (or were not) applied.

Critique. A combination of summary and response. Summary precedes response in a critique.

Tips For Writing Good Summaries

- Put aside your own opinions when you begin to read the original, and do not let yourself mentally argue with the author as you read. Remain objective in order to "hear" what the author is saying.
- Start your reading with these questions, in this order:
 - What is the topic?
 - What opinion does the author most want readers to keep in mind about this topic?
 - What arguments or information does the author use to convince (or try to convince) readers?
- Summarize *as you read*. Write a sentence in your own words at the end of each paragraph. Draw from these sentences for your final summary. Put the text out of view to ensure that you are summarizing *in your own words*. Check yourself.
- Never insert your own ideas into a summary. A summary contains only the ideas of the original author. Period. Your opinions are appropriate for the response or critique.
- Formatting can give you hints about main ideas and supporting points.
 - The title can suggest a question and answer about the topic.
 - Headings and section breaks can give a clue to main topics.
 - Italics or boldface type usually indicate an important point.
 - Paragraph or sentence numbering can indicate important points.
 - The main idea of a paragraph is often (though not always) expressed in the first two or last two sentences of the paragraph.

- The first paragraph often provides an overview of the entire article. The last paragraph often provides a very brief summary.

- Examples, illustrations, and anecdotes (little stories) are almost never main points. When you run across an example, ask yourself: Ok, what is this an example *of*?
- Use the original author's ideas, but not his or her words. Instead, paraphrase the author. *Paraphrase* means that you read the author's words, and, without referring to the text, write down the author's idea in your own words.
- Make sure you understand what you're reading. If you don't, talk to someone— instructor, classmate, Writing Center consultant—until you are sure you do. You can't summarize what you don't understand. Get help: it's not only allowed, it's encouraged.

Tips for Writing Good Responses

- In academic or scholarly writing,
 - responses are based on facts that you can support (facts from experts, class discussions, assigned reading in your text, and the like), not on hearsay or emotions
 - responses are based on the original author's purpose and audience.
 - you must provide support for the opinions you express in your response.
 - your opinions and interpretations appear only in your response, not in your summary of the author's work.
- Sometimes an instructor will ask you for a gut reaction or a reaction based on your own experience. In that case, and only in that case, you may stray from Point 4 above. Still, you should try to analyze your reaction so that you can state *why* you responded as you did.

Tips for Writing Good Critiques

The most frequent mistake students make when asked to critique an article is to tell the instructor only what the article is about. A critique requires that you articulate *your opinions* about the article. If your instructor does not provide guidelines for writing a critique, follow these:

- Identify the author, his or her affiliation, and the context for the article or presentation.
- In one to three paragraphs, summarize the article: Describe the focus and identify the major points of the article. Do not insert your opinions in this part.

- If the work being critiqued is a research study, describe the type of research, including purpose and methodology.
- Comment on the author's assumptions, methods, and conclusions. What was the author trying to accomplish? Did the author acknowledge and respond to other points of view? How objective was he or she? What new ideas were presented? How do the author's ideas compare with prevailing views on the topic? What strengths or weaknesses did you notice in the author's methods and reporting?

Comment on the author's work in terms of your own knowledge and experiences with the topic. If you came away with new insights, explain them. If you disagree with the author, say why; but explain your views as they derive from knowledge and objective experience, not from feelings or intuition.