



## How to Write a Summary and Response

WRITER'S ALLEY

### Summary

A summary is an accurate, objective—though abbreviated—report of an original document. In it, you try to convey the ideas of the original, generally maintaining the same order and emphasis. You should also spend a proportionate amount of space on the ideas of the original—so if half of the original covers one topic, half of your summary should do the same.

A summary is often only a paragraph, though it can be longer depending on the length of the original and the requirements of the assignment. A general guideline for length is that a summary should be 1/3 or less the length of the original.

Any summary should start with a clear statement of what is being summarized. You may start with an attention-getting statement to introduce the topic, but you should move immediately to a statement about the source. Include the title, author (add credentials if needed), abbreviated thesis and purpose. For example, a summary of William Strunk and E.B. White's *The Elements of Style* would start with the following **introductory statement**:

"In his book *The Elements of Style*, noted authors William Strunk and E.B. White presents the key features of good writing in order to teach students how to write effectively and eloquently."

This includes all of the core elements of a good summary introductory statement:

Title: *The Elements of Style*

Authors: William Strunk and E.B. White [credentials: noted author]

Abbreviated thesis: the key features of good writing

Purpose: to teach students to write effectively and eloquently.

### Types of Summaries

There are two types of summaries: constructed and overview. For either summary, you should take sufficient notes as you read the original. A **constructed** summary consists of the topic sentences for all the major paragraphs or sections of the original. In it, you start with an introductory statement (shown above) and then follow it with your paraphrased versions of the topic sentences in the original. You should smooth out the writing to make sure it flows well,

including transitions and connecting words. You can also add any significant subpoints or evidence if they are necessary for understanding the summary.

In an **overview** summary, you read the original, write the introductory statement (shown above) and then use your memory to paraphrase key ideas of the original. Once you have done this, you should go back to the original and your notes to make sure your summary accurately represents the ideas presented. You can add additional information in the order it appears in the original, if you missed anything. Then fill in any significant subpoints if they are necessary for understanding the summary.

## **Response**

Your response includes your own insights about what the original document says. You can agree with the original, disagree, or agree with some modifications. Your response can draw from other experts, personal experience, or your own beliefs. Generally, you should only include a response if it is part of your assignment. Your response should be directly related to the points brought up in the original and highlighted in your summary. There are two common ways to approach a summary and response assignment: summary followed by response or summary with integrated response. The following are two informal outlines showing how each works.

### **Summary and Response Outline**

- I. Attention-getter showing topic (optional)
- II. Introductory statement
- III. First topic sentence
- IV. Second topic sentence
- V. Remaining topic sentences in order
- VI. Response to thesis and purpose
- VII. Response to topic sentences in order
- VIII. Conclusion statement

### **Summary and Integrated Response Outline**

- I. Attention-getter showing topic (optional)
- II. Introductory statement
- III. Response to thesis and purpose
- IV. First topic sentence
- V. Response to first topic sentence
- VI. Second topic sentence
- VII. Response to second topic sentence
- VIII. Remaining topic sentences and responses in order
- IX. Conclusion statement