

Owlcation

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How to Write a Summary, Analysis, and Response Essay Paper With Examples

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A summary is telling the main ideas of the article in your own words.

Summary Writing Steps

These are the steps to writing a great summary:

1. Read the article, one paragraph at a time.
2. For each paragraph, underline the main idea sentence (topic sentence). If you can't underline the book, write that sentence on your computer or a piece of paper.
3. When you finish the article, read all the underlined sentences.
4. In your own words, write down one sentence that conveys the main idea. Start the sentence using the name of the author and title of the article (see format below).
5. Continue writing your summary by writing the other underlined sentences in your own words. Remember that you need to change both the words of the sentence and the word order. For more information, see the video below.
6. Don't forget to use transition words to link your sentences together. See my list of transition words below to help you write your summary more effectively and make it more interesting to read.
7. Make sure you include the name of the author and article and use "author tags" (see list below) to let the reader know you are talking about what the author said and not your own ideas.

8. Re-read your piece. Does it flow well? Are there too many details? Not enough? Your summary should be as short and concise as possible.

Sample Summary Outline

Author Tag: You need to start your summary by telling the name of the article and the author. Here are three examples of how to do that (pay close attention to the punctuation):

1. In "How the Civil War Began," historian John Jones explains...
2. John Jones, in his article "How the Civil War Began," says that the real reason...
3. "How the Civil War Began," by historian John Jones, describes...

First Sentence: Along with including the article's title and author's name, the first sentence should be the main point of the article. It should answer the question: What is this essay about? (thesis). Example:

In "How the Civil War Began" by John Jones, the author argues that the real reason for the start of the Civil War was not slavery, as many believe, but was instead the clash of cultures and greed for cash.

Rest of Summary: The rest of your essay is going to give the reasons and evidence for that main statement. In other words, what is the main point the writer is trying to make, and what are the supporting ideas he or she uses to prove it? Does the author bring up any opposing ideas, and if so, what does he or she do to refute them? Here is a sample sort of sentence:

_____ is the issue addressed in "(article's title)" by (author's name). The thesis of this essay is _____. The author's main claim is _____ and his/her sub claim is _____. The author argues _____. Other people argue _____. The author refutes these ideas by saying _____. His/her conclusion is _____.

How Often Do You Mention the Author?

You don't need to mention the author in every sentence of a summary, but you do need to make it clear when an idea is from the article and when it is your own idea. Usually, you want to be sure to tell the title of the article and the full name of the author in the first sentence of your summary. After that, use the author's last name or the title when you want to summarize something from the article or book. To avoid sounding too repetitious, you can substitute words in the table below.

Author Tag List

Author's Name	Article	Words for "Said"	Adverbs to Use With "Said"
James Garcia	"whole title"	argues	carefully
Garcia	"first couple of words"	explains	clearly
the author	the article (book etc.)	describes	insightfully
the writer	Garcia's article	elucidates	respectfully
the historian (or other profession)	the essay	complains	stingingly
essayist	the report	contends	shrewdly

Different ways to indicate who said what (and how, and where).

What About Multiple Authors?

For articles with 1-4 authors, cite all of the authors the first time you mention the article and title. Afterward, use "authors" or the last name of the first author and "et al." (which is Latin for "and others"). For articles with more than 4 authors, use the first and last name of the first author in the opening sentence and "et al." Then use the last name and "et al." or "authors" or some other plural throughout.

Sample Essays

- **Men and Women in Conversation:** Example response essay to Deborah Tannen's article about how divorce can be prevented if people learn the communication signals of the opposite gender.
- **Response Essay about Getting a Tattoo:** Responds to a personal experience article from the New York Times about a man who gets a dragon tattoo.
- **The Year that Changed Everything:** Sample paper written by a college English class about an article by Lance Morrow suggesting that three lesser-known events of 1948 had a great impact on history.

Transition Words List

Contrast	Adding Ideas	Emphasis
Although	In addition	Especially
However	Furthermore	Usually
In contrast	Moreover	For the most part
Nevertheless	In fact	Most importantly
On the contrary	Consequently	Unquestionably
Still	Again	Obviously

For a complete list, see my Hub "Easy Words to Use as Sentence Starters."

Questions for Analysis in a Summary

How is this written?

Who is the audience?

Is it effectively written for that audience?

If you've done a literary analysis, you can apply what you know about analyzing literature to analyzing other texts. You will want to consider what is effective and ineffective. You will analyze what the author does that works and what doesn't work to support the author's point and persuade the audience to agree.

Using TRACE for Analysis

Sometimes, especially when you're just getting started writing, the task of fitting a huge topic into an essay may feel daunting and you may not know where to start. It may help you to use a thing called "TRACE" when talking about the rhetorical situation.

TRACE stands for Text, Reader, Author, Context, and Exigence:

Text, Reader, and Author are easy to understand. When writing the analysis, you need to think about what kind of text it is and what the author wanted to have the audience think, do, or believe. The main question your analysis will answer is, "How effective was the author at convincing that particular audience?"

Context means several things: how the article fits into the history of discussion of that issue, the historical moment in time when the article is written, and the moment in time when a person reads the article.

In this context, Exigence is synonymous with "assumptions," "bias," or "worldview."

Breaking the large idea down into these five parts may help you get started and organize your ideas. In your paper, you'll probably want to address three to five of these elements.

Step-by-Step Sample

Each of the following elements can be one paragraph of your analysis. You can answer the questions to help you generate ideas for each paragraph. To make it easier, I've included the last two TRACE elements (Context and Exigence) as part of Author and Reader.

Text

1. How is the essay organized? What is effective or ineffective about the organization of the essay?
2. How does the author try to interest the reader?
3. How well does the author explain the main claims? Are these arguments logical?
4. Does the support and evidence seem adequate? Is the support convincing to the reader? Does the evidence actually prove the point the author is trying to make?

Author

1. Who is the author? What does he or she know about this subject?
2. What is the author's bias? Is the bias openly admitted? Does that make his or her argument more or less believable?

3. Do the author's knowledge and background make her or him reliable for this audience?
4. How does the author try to relate to the audience and establish common ground? Is it effective?
5. How does the author interest the audience? Does she or he make the reader want to know more?
6. Does the author explain enough about the history of this argument? Is anything left out?

Reader

1. Who is the reader?
2. How would they react to these arguments?
3. How is this essay effective or ineffective for this audience?
4. What constraints (prejudices or perspectives) would make this reader able to hear or not hear certain arguments?
5. What is the exigence (events at this moment in time which affect the need for this conversation) that makes the audience interested in this issue?

Professional Sample SAR

Michael Crichton's "[Let's Stop Scaring Ourselves](#)" argues that we are overdoing caution and fear. See my [Sample Reading Response](#) to this essay as well.

Sample Analysis Format

Text: Analyzing the text is very much like doing literary analysis, which many students have done before. Use all of your tools of literary analysis, including looking at the metaphors, rhythm of sentences, construction of arguments, tone, style, and use of language. Example:

The organization of "essay title" is effective/ineffective because _____. The essay's opening causes the reader to _____. The essay's style is _____ and the tone is shown by _____. The language used is _____. The essay's argument is constructed logically/illogically by _____. The essay is organized by _____ (*give a very brief description of the structure of the essay, perhaps telling where the description of the problem is, where claims are made, and where support is located—in which paragraphs—and why this is effective or ineffective in proving the point*).

Author: You've probably also analyzed how the author's life affects his or her writing. You can do the same for this sort of analysis. For example, in my sample reading the response about Michael Crichton's "Let's Stop Scaring Ourselves" article, students noted that the fact that Crichton is the author of doomsday thrillers like *Andromeda Strain* and *Jurassic Park* makes his argument that we shouldn't pay much attention to current doomsday scenarios like global warming rather ironic. If you don't know anything about the author, you can always do a quick Google Search to find out. Sample format:

The author establishes his/her authority by _____. The author's bias is shown in _____. The author assumes an audience who _____. He/She establishes common ground with the audience by _____.

Reader: You can write this section by inferring who the intended reader is, as well as looking at the text from the viewpoint of other sorts of readers. For example,

Readers are interested in this issue because of the exigence of _____. Constraints on the reader's reaction are _____. I think the reader would react to this argument by _____. I think that the author's _____ is effective. _____ is less effective because _____ includes _____. The support is adequate/inadequate and is relevant/irrelevant to the author's claim.

How to Write a Response

Generally, your response will be the end of your essay, but you may include your response throughout the paper as you select what to summarize and analyze. Your response will also be evident to the reader by the tone that you use and the words you select to talk about the article and writer. However, your response in the conclusion will be more direct and specific. It will use the information you have already provided in your summary and analysis to explain how you feel about this article. Most of the time, your response will fall into one of the following categories:

- You will agree with the author and back your agreement up with logic or personal experience.
- You will disagree with the author because of your experience or knowledge (although you may have sympathy with the author's position).
- You will agree with part of the author's points and disagree with others.
- You will agree or disagree with the author but feel that there is a more important or different point that needs to be discussed in addition to what is in the article.

How will this article fit into your own paper? How will you be able to use it?

Response answers:

What do you think?

Does this article persuade you?

Questions to Help You

Here are some questions you can answer to help you think about your response:

1. What is your reaction to the essay?
2. What common ground do you have with the author? How are your experiences the same or different from the author's and how has your experience influenced your view?
3. What in the essay is new to you? Do you know of any information the article left out that is relevant to the topic?
4. What in this essay made you re-think your view?
5. What does this essay make you think about? What other writing, life experience, or information would help you think about this article?
6. What do you like or dislike about the essay and/or the ideas in the essay?
7. How much of your response is related to your personal experience? How much is related to your worldview? How is this feeling related to the information you know?
8. How will this information be useful for you in writing your essay? What position does this essay support? Or where might you use this article in your essay?