

# Writing an Academic Summary



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An **academic summary** tells the main points of a source text in brief form. As a condensed version of the source material, it can range anywhere from a couple of sentences to a short summary article, depending on the length of the source and your purposes for writing. In writing a summary, you need to select the most important points of the source text and report on (vs. react to) them *using your own words*. You can combine several important points from the source into a brief general statement, or go more in depth and relate minor points as well, again depending on the purpose of your summary. Experts suggest, however, that a good rule of thumb to follow is that a summary is never more than about one-quarter the length of the original, though in most cases it is much briefer. Also, keep in mind that a summary must always be written in your own words, or if not, should contain direct quotations. To ignore this rule is *plagiarism*.

Some Purposes and Uses of Summaries:

- preparing for exams
- taking notes on your readings
- collecting and condensing information for research papers
- integrating sources into your writing

A good academic summary succeeds when it does the following:

- It identifies the author and the source (book or article). A summary typically contains this information in the first sentence. Expressions you can use to introduce this information include: “According to [the author]. . . .”; “In his/her book [title], [the author] states that . . . .”
- It gives credit to the author throughout. To make it clear that the ideas presented are the author’s and not your own, you should frequently use signals like “[The author] also states that . . . .”
- It begins by offering a broad overview of the material (one or two sentences), which is then developed in more detail in the body of the summary.
- It uses quotation marks and page references whenever a phrase, a part of a sentence, or a complete sentence is taken directly from the source text. But it also quotes selectively and sparingly.
- It is brief, but thorough enough to accomplish its purposes.
- It is an *accurate* reflection of the author’s viewpoint throughout. Therefore, carefully reading of the source is essential.