

Summarizing an Argument

One Page Tutorial

This tutorial describes the steps a reader should take when summarizing an author's argument. When we summarize an argument, we want to consider more than what the text is about. Good summaries will include a description of the central ideas including any claims made by the author. They will also discuss the structure of the text (that is, what the author does first, second, and third) and review evidence used to advance the argument. Depending on the writing task, we may be asked to analyze the author's rhetorical strategies and explain the author's purpose for writing the text. To prepare for this type of summary writing, we must read for multiple purposes. We need to read to understand the text but we must also read to gain insight into what the author is doing and how he or she uses language to construct meaning. The following steps will help us read the text critically, deepening our understanding of the argument.

Before summarizing an argument...

- 1.) Seek to understand the reading and writing task.
What are you expected to know and do? What are you summarizing?
- 2.) Carefully read the text.
Read the text once to get a general idea of what the text is about.
- 3.) Re-read and mark the text.
Circle key terms and underline the author's claims.
- 4.) Chart individual paragraphs.
Chart individual paragraphs in order to gain insight into what the author is saying and how he or she says it. Examine the overall structure of the text as part of your charting.

Consider the following questions while writing summary (or charting) statements in the margins. If you cannot write in your text, build margins with sticky notes or write your statements in your Cornell notes.

- *What is this paragraph (or section) about?*
- *What is the author saying?*
- *Does the author make a claim in this paragraph (or section)? What does he or she argue?*
- *What is the author doing in this paragraph (or section)?*

Below are some possible starter sentences for summary statements.

- *Author X states (or argues, claims, contends) that...*
- *This section is about...*
- *This paragraph is about...*
- *This section discusses...*

- *He (or she) begins with...*
- *Paragraph two introduces (or it might do some other work)...*
- *In the section (insert subtitle here), Author X argues...*
- *The author presents a couple of ideas...*
- *The main idea of this passage is...*

Below are some possible starter sentences for charting statements.

- *Introducing the idea that...*
- *Reviewing research...*
- *Challenging the view that...*
- *Interpreting data...*
- *Interviewing people who have...*
- *Establishing authority...*
- *Describing the characteristics...*
- *Providing an anecdote...*

Consider the following when summarizing an argument:

- Ideas are present in the order that they appear in the text; however, you may need to present ideas in a different order if it makes sense to do so.
- Refer to your markings, charting statements, summary statements, and any other comments you made as you craft your summary.
- Use accurate verbs like clarifying, interpreting, or introducing, to describe what an author is doing in a paragraph or section of text.
- Use your own words and paraphrase when necessary. Ideas taken directly from the source should be properly quoted and cited.
- Directly quote or paraphrase the author's claims. If claims are not explicitly stated, go back and examine the text for claims that are made implicitly.
- Be aware of your own biases; avoid inaccurate interpretations or representations.
- Read your paragraph or full summary for clarity and accuracy. Someone reading your summary should have a good understanding of what the author is saying and doing in the text being summarized.

Summarizing Sections of an Argument: *Guided Practice* *Student Activity*

This activity is designed to support students as they learn how to summarize arguments. The work presented here could be completed in Cornell notes.

Title of Work: _____

Author: _____ Type of Text: _____

Which paragraph(s) are you summarizing? Paragraph(s) # _____

1.) What is the author doing? Use a verb like introducing, defining, asserting, illustrating, or some other verb that accurately describes what the author is doing.

Example: *The author is introducing the idea of a civil society...*

2.) What is this paragraph about? What does the author say? Account for main ideas, central claims, evidence, or other essential information. If the writer cites an authority (an expert or another writer) note the authority and record what he or she says.

Examples: *This paragraph defines a civil society as...*

The author provides the following examples of civil societies...

Cited author X states that...

3.) Use this space to craft a concise summary sentence(s) that includes the ideas from questions 1 and 2.

One Page Report: Poster Activity

The following summary exercise can be used to assist students as they learn how to analyze an author's argument. The One Page Report: Poster Activity combines visual and textual elements. Because information from the text is presented in manageable parts, this activity becomes accessible to a wide range of students; it also works well as a change of pace. The following is a description of the activity.

The teacher will need to gather the following materials:

- For individuals, use standard 8 ½ x 11 unlined paper; for groups, use poster paper
- Markers or colored pencils
- Rulers
- Each student should have a copy of the text

It is always a good idea to provide structure and guidance when asking students to do this type of work. Below you will find suggestions for design, content, and assessment.

Design

- Names should be written on the back of the paper.
- Written work must be in ink or typed.
- Use color when appropriate.
- Ideas should be organized and presented clearly.
- Use your best penmanship when creating your One Page Report. Your work needs to be legible.
- Organize your one pager so that it makes sense.
- Creativity is welcome.

Content

- Write the title of the text at the top of the page.
- Include the author(s) full name (place underneath the title).
- Write the publication date next to or underneath the title.
- Copy a significant quotation from the text and explain why you think it is important (provide a parenthetical reference).
- Summarize the author's key claims.
- List the evidence the author uses to advance his or her argument.
- Account for any key terms in the text and explain how they are used.
- Draw two or more illustrations that represent the ideas discussed in the text.

Assessment

- The teacher may want to create a rubric or score sheet for holistic grading.
- Students can present their posters to small groups or to the whole class.
- Students can turn in their posters for a grade.

Say, Do, Mean

What does the author Say? What does the author do? And, What does it mean?

The following summary exercise can be used to assist students as they learn how to analyze an author's argument. Say, Do, Mean scaffolds some of the important elements found in a Rhetorical Précis—a summary exercise that asks students to craft a concise analysis of an argument. This activity presents three different ways to think about an argument: (1) what is the author saying?; (2) what is the author doing?; and (3) what is the meaning of the text? Isolating these ideas into three separate sections allows each to be thought and written about separately. The following describes what to include in each of the three parts.

Part 1: Explain what the author is saying.

In this section, introduce the source, the author, and provide comments about the author or source. In the same sentence, paraphrase or directly quote the author's main claim.

Example:

*In her essay "Don't Take Valuable Space in My School," Jenny While, a senior at El Cajon Valley High School, **argues that** students who are unmotivated and misbehaved take away from the learning environment and cause teachers to slow down and lower expectations.*

Once you have introduced the author and his or her main claim, include other essential or relevant information like main ideas, evidence, and other support.

Part 2: Analyze what the author is doing.

For this section, analyze what the author is doing in individual paragraphs (or in a section of text). Describe the rhetorical choices the author has made (for instance, the author shares an anecdote, reviews current research, or does some other work) and explain why the author has made these choices (usually these explanations begin with, "in order to").

Example:

*Mark Lynas **observes** the rapid decrease in glacial ice and the evaporation of lakes and streams **in order to** illustrate the devastating effects global warming is having on nature and the people who depend on it.*

There is no limit to how many rhetorical choices an author makes in one text. Identify the most significant rhetorical strategies and explain why the author is using them.

Part 3: Evaluate the meaning of the text.

In this last section, evaluate the significance of the text. What greater meaning can be assigned to the text? What deeper connections can we make to our own lives? This section allows the reader to move the discussion from one context to another.

Say, Do, Mean

What does the author **say**? (What is the text about?)

What does the author **do**? (What rhetorical choices has the author made?)

What does the text mean? (What is significant about this text?)

Rhetorical Précis: Template

In _____
(Include the following: author's first and last name, type of text, title of work)

_____ argues that _____
(author's last name)

_____.

He/ she claims that _____

_____ this claim by first _____
(He/She) (supports/develops) (Explain what the author is doing: verb)

Then _____

And finally, _____

_____ 's purpose is to _____
(author's last name)

in order to _____

_____ establishes _____
(He/She) (Describe the tone of the author: formal, sarcastic, critical, etc.)

for _____
(What is the relationship between the author and his/her audience?)

This work is significant because _____

Summarizing Informational Texts

One Page Tutorial

This tutorial describes the steps a reader should take when summarizing expository texts. When we summarize purely informational texts, we want to account for the main ideas. Because informational texts can be content heavy, we will need to read carefully for the most important information. And not all the information in the text is important. Seek to understand the reading and writing task. Establishing a purpose for reading will help narrow our focus as we make decisions about what we should include in our summaries. The following steps will help us complete this type of reading and writing assignment.

Before summarizing the text...

- 1.) Seek to understand the reading and writing task.
What are you expected to know and do? What are you summarizing?
- 2.) Carefully read the text.
Read the text once to get a general idea of what the text is about.
- 3.) Re-read and mark the text.
Circle terms and underline information relevant to the reading and writing task.
- 4.) Pause to connect ideas within the text.
Connect what is said to the visuals in the text. Ask questions like, "How does this section connect to the previous section?" or "What does this idea have to do with that idea?"
- 5.) Write summary statements in the margin.

Consider the following questions while writing summary statements in the margins. If you cannot write in your text, build margins with sticky notes or write your statements in your Cornell notes.

- *What is this paragraph (or section) about?*
- *What is the author saying?*
- *What is the author doing in this paragraph (or section)?*

Below are some possible starter sentences for summary statements.

- *This section is about...*
- *This paragraph is about...*
- *This section discusses...*
- *He (or she) begins with...*
- *Paragraph two introduces (or it might do some other work)...*
- *In the section (insert subtitle here), we learn that...*
- *The author presents a couple of ideas...*
- *The main idea of this passage is...*

Consider the following when summarizing informational text:

- Ideas are typically present in the order that they appear in the text; however, you may need to present ideas in a different order if it makes sense to do so.
- Refer to your markings, summary statements, and any other comments you made as you craft your summary.
- Use accurate verbs like defining, illustrating, or introducing, to describe what an author is doing in a paragraph or section of text.
- Include important content and lesson based vocabulary.
- Account for the main ideas in the text. We should include enough information so that someone who has not read the text would understand the main points.
- Use your own words and paraphrase when necessary. Ideas taken directly from the source should be properly quoted and cited.
- What we quote and how we quote it will depend on the actual discipline. For example, a science paper will have far fewer direct quotations than an English or social science paper. As a general rule, we should directly quote ideas that cannot be expressed accurately through paraphrasing or summarizing.
- Write objectively. Be sensitive to biases; avoid inaccurate interpretations or representations. We should express the ideas in the text fairly and accurately.
- Summaries should be read for clarity and accuracy.
- Summaries should not be more than one-fourth to one-third the length of the original text.

Summarizing Sections of Informational Texts

This activity is designed to support students as they learn how to summarize expository texts. The work presented here could be done in students' Cornell notes.

Title of Work: _____

Author: _____ Type of Text: _____

Which paragraph(s) are you summarizing? Paragraph(s) # _____

1.) What is this paragraph or section about? What is it saying?

2.) On the lines below, record information from the reading that is relevant to your reading purpose.

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3.) Use this space to craft a concise summary sentence(s) that includes the ideas from questions 1 and 2.
