A summary restates the main idea and important points of a text in a student’s own words. It is normally 1/4 the size of the original text. The ability to summarize is useful for writing research papers, where students are expected to present, in their own words, the information they have gathered from various sources, or it is useful for note-taking and studying for exams. Summarizing helps a reader to synthesize information.

How to write a summary:

1. **Read the text carefully.** Look up any words you don’t know and, as you read, underline or highlight the points you feel are important.

2. Make an outline of the important points you identified when reading. This outline usually will include one main idea from every paragraph. Try to emphasize the points the author emphasizes.

3. Write your summary from your outline. Don’t look at the original text.

4. The first sentence should read like this: In her article, “Language and Women’s Place” (Language and Society 2, 1973), Robin Lakoff (discusses, states, argues, describes) ...

    The first sentence should give the **thesis or main ideas** of the text you are summarizing.

5. It is good to restate the author’s name later on in the summary to remind the reader that you are summarizing another writer’s work.

6. Read the summary **out loud**. Make sure that someone who has not read the original text will be able to understand your summary.
WHAT IS A SUMMARY?

A summary restates the main ideas of an author (without most of the details) in your own words. It is generally about ¼ of the length of the original.

WHY ARE SUMMARIES IMPORTANT?

In the university you often have to write library research papers. In these papers you gather information from many sources and include this information in your paper. A few direct quotes are allowed, but generally you are expected to summarize or paraphrase this information in your own words. (You also have to indicate the source.) Summary writing gives you practice in this rather difficult task. Most students also tell me that when they write summaries, their understanding of what they are reading improves. In addition, by the end of the quarter many of my students say that they feel their writing has improved as well, and I would agree. Finally, as students use new words they have learned in their summary, their vocabulary improves as well.

HOW DO I WRITE A SUMMARY?
(check off each step as you do it.)

✓ Preview the article (read the title, sub-title, headings, first paragraph, first sentence of the following paragraphs, and the last paragraph). Get an overall idea of what this article is about. This is when you should use your dictionary. Look up unknown words that seem to be important from your preview.

✓ Read the article. Underline (about 20%) as you read.

✓ Go back over the article and make boxes over just the key words/phrases that you underlined. The boxes should remind you of the author’s main idea. (Boxes should equal about 5% of the article.) If I give you study questions to help you find the main ideas, answer those in your own words.

✓ Make an informal outline of the article from your “boxes.” Usually, but not always, you should include in your outline one main idea from every paragraph of the article. Emphasize the points the author emphasizes.

✓ Begin to write your summary from your outline, without looking at the original article.

✓ Your first sentence should approximately follow this model: “In his article ‘March on Washington’ (Newsweek, April 8, 1991) Osborn Elliot (discusses, states, argues, describes)…. ” MAKE SURE THAT YOUR FIRST SENTENCE GIVES THE THESIS (i.e. main thrust) OF THE ARTICLE.

✓ At a later point in your summary remind us one more time that you are summarizing another person’s work: e.g. “Mr. Elliot (or ‘the author’) also (states, believes, argues, etc.)…. ”

✓ If you want to, you may directly quote the author once briefly. Use quotation marks.

✓ Include a response at the end. Mark it “MY RESPONSE.” Here and only here should you include your opinions.

✓ Go back over your summary and check that you have not copied more than three consecutive words. (By all means, use new vocabulary from this article in your summary, but do not copy more than three words in a row.)

✓ Now read your summary out loud and make sure that your meaning will be clear to someone who has not read the article.

✓ Now read your summary out loud a second time, and look for grammar mistakes. Especially look for mistakes in: 1) run-ons, 2) verb tenses, 3) articles, 4) spelling of easy words

✓ Type your summary and use spell-check. For most of the articles we read in this class your summaries should be not less than 200 words nor more than 250 words. Learning to type now (we have software to help you with this) will save you time later. In the university, papers you write almost always have to be typed.