

Summarizing

Summarizing is . . .

- a method of reducing an information source to its main ideas.
- a writing tool that enables you to give your reader the gist of an information source.
- a study tool that helps you recapitulate the main points of material you have to learn.
- a reading technique that helps you differentiate primary ideas from less important details and examples.

Two types of summaries:

- 1) Restatement: (used often in "abstracts" of articles)
 - a simple presentation of the original source material in condensed form

Example:

When people declare themselves independent of their political ties, they should give reasons. Governments are formed to protect equality and rights, including "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." If government does not do this, people can change the government (Jefferson 461).

- 2) Descriptive: (useful when analyzing a source)
 - a description of the development of the discussion within the original source

Example:

Jefferson opens the Declaration of Independence by stating that a country declaring independence needs to give reasons for doing so. He then discusses the purposes of government in protecting individual rights and the legitimacy of change if government does not live up to its obligations (461).

What is a "Good" summary?

- It will indicate (in condensed form) the main points of the original that support or explain the original's thesis.
- It will present the order in which these points are presented and the emphasis given to them.
- It will not contain any of your own opinion concerning the topic or the presentation of the author's argument.
- It will provide your reader a firm grasp of the original without having to refer to the original. That is, it can be understood *independent* of the original.

A Method for Writing a Summary

- Read, reread, reread, etc., the original. You must become thoroughly familiar with your source.
- Identify the main points either by making a scratch outline or underlining.
- Separate each "stage of thought" (not necessarily paragraphs), and consider each independently.
- Write brief summaries of each "stage of thought."

(NOTE: Step 4 should be completed without referring to the original source.)

- Combine these summaries and add transitional elements as needed to insure clarity and continuity.
- Identify the thesis of the source.