

The documents in this pdf are assignment sheets and handouts that I have used in my developmental writing classes. Feel free to use and modify them as appropriate for your class. If you have questions or suggestions, my e-mail is stoddwordplay@gmail.com

[sample assignment]
Article Summary Paragraph – 25 points possible

All work to be handed in must be done on a word processor. Double space the document. Use 12-point Times New Roman font. Put your name, my name, the class name (Basic Writing Skills II and 10:00 or 12:30), and the date in the upper left-hand corner. Give your paragraph a title. Indent the first line. Set up your document with one-inch margins all the way around.

[insert instructions for finding appropriate articles]

Read through the article a couple of times, marking key words, phrases, or sentences. Refer to a dictionary for any unfamiliar words. Then look away from the article and think about what stood out to you. What do you remember without referring to the source? Jot down some notes about some main ideas and sub points. Then look back over the article and see what you should add or leave out.

Remember that your goal in a summary is to give a shorter form of the original article, explaining what the author says but using your own words and sentence structure. You should not restate everything the author says. If you did that, your summary would be as long as the original article. Instead, focus on the key points of the article. Many articles start with a history or background. You can include a brief discussion of it, but concentrate mainly on the argument and supporting points. Each paragraph of the article should have a main point that is backed up with more information or supporting details. Each paragraph, then, could be a sentence or two in your summary.

Think about these questions:

What is the writer's main point? Are there sub points?

What methods does the writer use to prove his points? Does he or she include facts, examples, details, or statistics?

Identify the author and article title (in quotation marks) in the beginning of your summary. Use the full author's name the first time; after, use only the last name. You can also say "he," "she," or "the author" in future references. Make sure to refer to the author throughout in order to make it clear that you are summarizing, not adding your own thoughts or opinions.

Use tag phrases like these to make sure you are giving credit to the author:

According to X ...

X argues that ...

X says, "Quote."

In discussing the issue, X claims...

X points out that ...

Other points X makes include

Include quotation marks around the author's exact words, but use more paraphrases than quotations. Otherwise, you are doing more copying and pasting than writing.



[Basic templates for sentences and paragraphs in a summary]

Sentence Structure for a Summary

Topic sentence

Lists author, title, and a one-sentence summary of the main point or points of the article

Sample Templates:

In “Article Title,” Author Name argues (that) ...

In her article “Title,” Author Name explains (that) ...

Author Name, author of “Title,” discusses ...

Author Name argues (that) ... in her article “Title.”

Transitions

Sample Templates:

One point Name makes is ...

He (or she) supports that point by ...

Name also argues that ...

Sample Paragraph

In her article “Nap Time,” Carol Jennings argues that companies should be required to provide facilities for their employees to sleep during work hours. Her plan would allow workers to take naps of up to 30 minutes during every 8 hours of work. She says that napping during the day would benefit workers by “giving them time to rest and reset.” The workers would be more productive when they wake up. She also argues that napping has been shown to help keep workers happier and healthier. Having happier, more productive employees would benefit their employers. According to Jennings, “Studies show that workers who nap miss work less often.” She does recognize that employers may resist her suggestion, not wanting to pay workers for sleeping on the job. To counter these arguments, she compares nap time to smoking breaks. Employers have allowed workers to take time away from work to smoke cigarettes, which harm their health. In contrast, Jennings says, nap breaks provide benefits for workers and companies alike. Jennings envisions a world in which employers provide cots for workers who pack a pillow and toothbrush as they head to their jobs.

[Longer instructions and templates]

Summarizing an Article

Your goal in a summary is to give a shorter form of the original piece of writing, explaining what the author says but using your own words and sentence structure. You should not restate everything the author says. If you did that, your summary would be as long as the original article. Instead, focus on the key points of the article or essay.

Summarizing helps readers comprehend and remember what they read. Being able to restate a piece of writing means that you have understood it and can work with it. Begin by making sure you have a clear understanding of the article. Read through it a couple of times, marking key words, phrases, or sentences. Refer to a dictionary for any unfamiliar words.

As you read, think about these questions:

- What is the writer's main point? What smaller arguments does he or she include to support the main point?
- What methods does the writer use to back up arguments? Does he or she include facts, examples, details, or statistics?

Next, look away from the article and think about what stood out to you. What do you remember without referring to the source? Jot down some notes about some main ideas and sub points. Then look back over the article and see what you should add or leave out.

When you summarize, you explain and discuss only the information and ideas that are in the original source. You should not add to the original piece of writing. Also, do not include your own ideas or reaction to the original source. You may disagree with the writer, but your job in a summary is to explain what he or she said, not to respond or react to it.

Topic Sentence for a Summary Paragraph

In a summary paragraph, the topic sentence includes the author, title, and a brief synopsis of the main point or points of the article. Use the full name of the author the first time you refer to him or her; after that, use only the last name. If you have multiple authors, give all names the first time, and then refer to "the authors" or use last names. Also, make sure to punctuate article titles with capital letters and quotation marks, and remember that commas and periods go inside quotation marks.

Sample Sentence Structure

In "Article Title," Author Name argues (that) ...

In her article "Title," Author Name explains (that) ...

Author Name, author of "Title," discusses ...

Author Name argues (that) ... in her article "Title."

Sample Topic Sentences

In her article “Nap Time,” Carol Jennings argues that companies should be required to provide facilities for their employees to sleep during work hours.

Carol Jennings, author of “Nap Time,” discusses the benefits of allowing workers to sleep on the job.

Carol Jennings says that companies and workers would benefit from allowing napping at work in her article “Nap Time.”

Body Sentences

The structure of your summary can follow the organization of the original article. In the body of your summary paragraph, discuss the author’s main points. You can include some discussion of how he or she explains and proves those points, but focus mainly on the bigger arguments, not the support.

Make sure to refer to the author frequently to show that you are discussing someone else’s arguments, not listing your own. Compare these two sentences:

People should not be allowed to own exotic pets.

Ford argues that people should not be allowed to own exotic pets.

The first sounds like it is the writer’s own opinion; the second makes it clear that the writer is discussing Ford’s argument. Vary your sentence structure, though. Do not start every sentence with “Author says.”

Sample Sentence Structure

(Remember that you are using only the author’s last name here.)

One point Name makes is ...

He (or she) supports that point by ...

Name begins by discussing ...

Name also argues that ...

Perhaps Name’s most controversial argument is ...

Name backs up her opinions with ...

Paraphrasing and Quoting

Paraphrasing means using the original author’s information and ideas but putting them into your own words. When you paraphrase, you do not use quotation marks, but you do need to give credit to the original source. Most of your summary should be paraphrases, but you can include a few quotes for variety and to show the author’s specific points.

When you reproduce an author’s exact words, you are quoting that author. Quoting means copying the original writer’s words and pasting them into your paper. Those words need to be in quotation marks.

Include the writer's name or an attribution like "She said" or "According to" with the quoted words. Periods and commas go inside quotation marks.

Name said, "Quote goes here."

"Quote can start a sentence this way," she said.

You can quote part of a sentence and "blend it smoothly with your own words," Name said.

Sample Outline for a Summary Paragraph

Topic sentence (including author's name, article title, and main point)

Sub point 1 made by author

Discussion, support, quotes

Sub point 2 made by author

Discussion, support, quotes

Sub point 3 made by author

Discussion, support, quotes

Concluding sentence (optional)

Template for a Summary Paragraph

Author Name argues main point of argument in her article "Title." She begins by presenting background information that explains why the topic is important. Next, she explains why the main point needs to change. She says that main point is important because of information she includes. Making this change would help because of this reason. Name argues that the change is necessary because of facts like these. Another point she makes is an additional reason. She says, "These words are worth quoting." Making the change would have benefits like these. Finally, Name includes her belief that not making the change she suggests will have important consequences like these.

Sample Summary Paragraph

Notice that the following paragraph includes frequent references to the author and varies those references, sometimes calling her by name and sometimes using pronouns (“she” and “her”).

In her article “Nap Time,” Carol Jennings argues that companies should be required to provide facilities for their employees to sleep during work hours. Her plan would allow workers to nap up to 30 minutes during every 8 hours of work. She says that napping during the day would benefit workers by “giving them time to rest and reset.” The workers would be more productive when they wake up. She also argues that napping has been shown to help keep workers happier and healthier. Having happier, more productive employees would benefit their employers. According to Jennings, “Studies show that workers who nap miss work less often.” She does recognize that employers may resist her suggestion, not wanting to pay workers for sleeping on the job. To counter these arguments, she compares nap time to smoking breaks. Employers have allowed workers to take time away from work to smoke cigarettes, which harm their health. In contrast, Jennings says, nap breaks provide benefits for workers and companies alike. Jennings envisions a world in which employers provide cots for workers who pack a pillow and toothbrush as they head to their jobs.

.....

[Combined summary and response paragraph assignment]

Points of View Reference Center -- Reaction Paragraph – 25 points possible

Choose one of the two articles you read and write a reaction to it. Begin your paragraph with a brief summary, a sentence or two that sums up the writer’s main points. Then discuss your reaction to what you read.

Look at questions like these: What points does the writer make? How does he or she (or they) make them? Does the writer use facts, personal experience, or expert opinion to back up points? What did you learn from the article? How did you react to the information in it? What did you agree or disagree with? Which points stood out? What struck you as interesting or provocative? What did you like or dislike about the style or substance of the piece?

Try to separate the way you already felt about the issue prior to reading the piece from your reaction to the piece itself. If you disagree with the author and do not think he or she made a good case, explain why the points were not strong. Or if you disagree but still think he or she made good points, you can discuss that. Either way, try to avoid dismissing the argument simply because you do not agree. If you agree with the author and the argument, make sure to discuss specific aspects of the article that support your opinions and ideas.

I disagree with Author about [issue] because her argument left out many important arguments that contradict her ideas. In “Title,” author writes that [brief summary]. She uses some facts and statistics to support her claim that blah blah blah. She also uses strong statements like, “Quote” to get the audience’s attention. However, she did not address many people’s main problem with the issue; she did not talk about important points like blah blah blah. She simply says, “Quote,” which does not factor in this point. In addition, she fails to address issues like yada yada yada. This made me question her reliability. Also, this issue is important to me because [personal connection], so I believe that we should [opinion]. Author hurt her credibility with her limited argument.

I agree with Author about [issue] because she supported her argument with a strong mixture of facts and opinion. In “Title,” author writes that [brief summary.] The strongest part of her argument is blah blah blah. She supports these opinions with [facts]. Another good argument she made is yada yada yada. This argument makes sense because of [facts or opinions]. She makes this point best when she says, “Quote.” I also agree with her that abcd. I have always supported the idea that blah blah blah. Author’s good use of facts and clear beliefs in her topic make her argument convincing.



[Summary and response assignment for a specific article (article excerpt removed)]

Summary and Response Paragraphs – 25 points each

Reprinted below is an excerpt from an article called “The Myth of ‘I’m Bad at Math’” published on *The Atlantic* magazine’s website. Read it, and then write the following two paragraphs:

- 1) Summarize the article, following the guidelines you used for the previous summaries in this class. Make sure to begin by giving authors and title. Explain the main points that the authors are making. Reword their points, but also include some quotes. Make sure to give them credit for their points and ideas. Include transitions, such as “another point Kimball and Smith make is ...” or “the authors also argue that...”
- 2) Respond to the article, including specific details and examples from the articles and from your own thoughts, ideas, and experience. Look at points like these (but not necessarily in this order): What did you agree with? Was there anything you disagreed with? Why? What did you learn about learning from reading this? How do you see yourself and your ability to learn? What are some examples of times you have been able or unable to learn something? What might you change about your attitude or work habits as a result of reading this?

Comparison/Contrast Mini-Essay

Comparison papers should begin with a basis of comparison. Why are these two items comparable? If two items are very similar on the surface, a comparison might examine unexpected differences. If two items are different at first glance, a comparison might explore surprising similarities. In this case, both items for comparison deal with the same issue, so the basis of comparison should be built into the assignment. You can still discuss the issue by laying it out and providing setup and context for your readers.

For this assignment you will choose two articles and write a comparison/contrast. This paper will be a mini-essay in three paragraphs.

Begin by choosing two articles that present arguments about a topic. The Points of View Reference Center database is a good source of paired articles.

Read the two articles a few times and develop a list of their main points.

Paragraph 1: summary of article 1

Paragraph 2: summary of article 2

Paragraph 3: your reaction. Discuss the strength of each article and argument and which you most effective overall. Compare or contrast at least three aspects of the two items. sure to use transitions between points. Include some quotes and many details from the two articles for support.

Sample reaction paragraph

Author 1 and Author 2 both deal with the topic of Issue, but Author 1’s article was stronger and more convincing. Author 1 presented details and statistics to prove her points while Author 2 used more emotional arguments. For example, in her article Author 1 said, “This information is important. Here are some facts to support it.” In contrast, Author 2 used words like “scary” and “devastating” but did not back up her points with evidence. Furthermore, Author 1 had a balanced tone. She presented both sides of the issue and admitted that the opposition made good points in some areas. Author 2, however, only gave her views of the issue. This made her approach seem biased and unfair. The most convincing aspect of Author 1’s article was her conclusion. She presented her own story and connected it to her points. This gave her article a stronger ending than Author 2’s, which seemed to fade away. Author 2 ends her piece with, “I hope things change some day,” which was a weak ending. I came away knowing that Article 1 by Author 1 was a solid, convincing argument for Issue.

Cause and Effect Paragraph Assignment

Examine the following topics:

- Effects of texting on communication
- Causes of the popularity of social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)
- Effects of social media
- Causes of the popularity of texting

Write a paragraph in which you examined a narrowed version of these topics. You should show a clear connection between the item of discussion and its contributory causes or resulting effects. Include specific details and examples from your own experience, and use research to back up your ideas. One or two sources is sufficient for a one-paragraph assignment.

This assignment does not necessarily call for an evaluative response (whether the effects are good or bad), but you may want to approach it that way. Support your opinions as thoroughly as possible in a short assignment like this one.

We will use this assignment as a building point for a longer essay dealing with cause and effect.

Grammar points to remember:

- “Affect” is usually a verb meaning “to change.”
- “Effect” is usually a noun meaning a result
- Don’t write, “The reason for X is because ...”
- It should be, “The reason for X is...” or “is that...”
- You can also say, “X happens because Y.”