A photograph of two young women in a sewing studio. The woman on the left is standing and smiling, wearing a red polka-dot apron over a white top. The woman on the right is sitting at a table, looking down at papers. In the background, there are sewing machines, a mannequin, and various sewing supplies.

PARAGRAPHS AND ESSAYS

Part 3

Special College Writing Projects

19 Writing Summaries
and Reports 279

20 Writing the Research Essay 288

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YOU KNOW THIS

You often use summaries and reports:

- You summarize events or TV shows for friends.
- You tell a classmate who missed class what happened.
- You summarize a meeting at work for your boss.

19

Writing Summaries and Reports

Condensing Important Information

Write a Summary

A **summary** is a condensed, or shortened, version of a longer piece of writing, a conversation, or a situation. It presents the main ideas and major support, stripping down the information to its essential elements.

Four Basics of a Good Summary

- 1** It has a topic sentence (in a paragraph) or a thesis statement (in an essay) that states what is being summarized and its main idea.
- 2** It identifies the major support points.
- 3** It includes any final observations or recommendations made in the original piece.
- 4** It is written in your own words and presents information without your opinions.

1 The essay “Target and Wal-Mart: Not as Different as You Think” states that while Wal-Mart is often villainized, and Target is welcomed, the two large chains are more similar than different. **2** The first similarity the author presents is the quality of the merchandise, which, he says, is perceived as poor at Wal-Mart and high at Target. However, there is no proof for this perception, he notes. The second similarity concerns the business practices of the two chains. While Wal-Mart is often criticized for its low pay and anti-union activities, Target is not blamed for its

TIP The essay “Target and Wal-Mart: Not as Different as You Think” is on pages 231–32.

4 Summary is in the writer's own words.

negative business practices. The author cites improvements Wal-Mart has made in its practices. The third similarity is the effect on local economies. Both chain stores can have a negative effect on small businesses, but Wal-Mart, not Target, is fought by local communities. The author gives examples of how Wal-Mart has helped local economies, while Target has not. 3 The author concludes by saying that Wal-Mart is singled out for bad publicity because of its large size. He wonders about other ways in which the media shape people's views.

There are many uses for summarizing.

- COLLEGE** A test question asks you to summarize a particular procedure or finding.
- WORK** You write a summary of a telephone conversation to send to a client and your boss.
- EVERYDAY LIFE** You summarize a car accident for your insurance company.

The Reading Process for Summaries

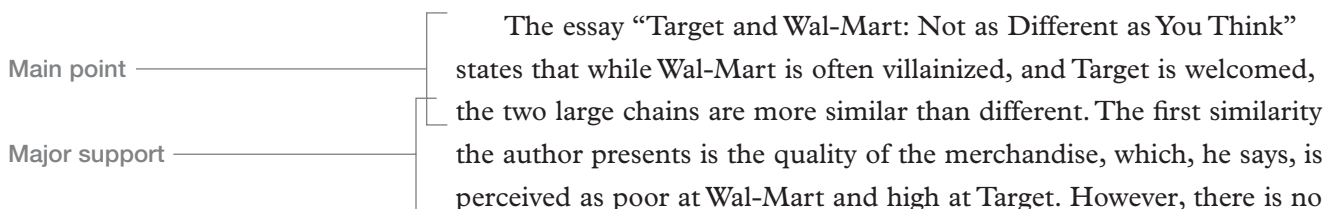
To write a summary, you must first understand what you are reading. To note what is important as you read, you might follow this process:

READING TO SUMMARIZE

1. Double-underline the main point and write “main point” in the margin next to it.
2. Underline each major support point. This support may be a sentence or a group of sentences. For each major support point, write “major support” in the margin.
3. Underline the final observations, recommendations, or conclusions, and write “conclusion” in the margin.
4. After you finish reading, write a sentence or two, in your own words, about what is important about the piece.

NOTE: Instead of underlining, you could use two different-colored highlighters for steps 1 and 2.

Here is the paragraph from the Four Basics of a Good Summary, underlined and annotated using the steps of the reading process.



proof for this perception, he notes. The second similarity concerns the business practices of the two chains. While Wal-Mart is often criticized for its low pay and anti-union activities, Target is not blamed for its negative business practices. The author cites improvements Wal-Mart has made in its practices. The third similarity is the effect on local economies. Both chain stores can have a negative effect on small businesses, but Wal-Mart, not Target, is fought by local communities. The author gives examples of how Wal-Mart has helped local economies, while Target has not. The author concludes by saying that Wal-Mart is singled out for bad publicity because of its large size. He wonders about other ways in which the media shape people's views.

Major support

Major support

Conclusion

WHAT'S IMPORTANT: The writer argues that Wal-Mart is really no worse than Target, yet Wal-Mart has been criticized even as it has tried to improve its business practices.

PRACTICE 1 Reading to Summarize

Read the following essay, and mark it according to the four steps of Reading to Summarize.

In 2009, Wall Street met Main Street, as financial institutions received billions of dollars of taxpayer money to rescue them. After receiving huge infusions of cash from the government, many financial institutions continued business as usual, with excessive spending and a reluctance to account for how they spent the bailout money. Only when a specific practice was discovered did the institutions agree to modify their behavior. On Friday, January 30, 2009, Missouri Senator Claire McCaskill captured the public feeling when she said, "They don't get it. These people are idiots. You can't use taxpayer money to pay out \$18 billion in bonuses. . . . What planet are these people on?" ("McCaskill")

One example of excess was the bonuses paid to Merrill Lynch executives after it had been acquired by Bank of America. Despite massive losses, Merrill Lynch decided to pay some of its employees nearly \$5 billion in bonuses, even *after* Bank of America had already received one payment from Washington and had requested a second. Upon learning of this, the attorney general of New York issued a subpoena to the executives responsible for this highly irresponsible action. Other companies were exposed for similar bonuses paid to executives who helped to destroy the economy.

As daily examples of corporate excess were exposed, the public outcry was loud and sustained. Citigroup outraged people repeatedly. First, the media discovered that after receiving public funds, the company planned to purchase a \$5 million luxury corporate jet. Only with intense pressure did it cancel the order. A few weeks later, its plans to spend \$400 million for naming rights to the New York Mets Shea Stadium were revealed. Meanwhile, other recipients of bailout money continued to plan luxurious, all-expenses-paid trips to reward employees, to places like Monte Carlo and Las Vegas. Such trips were canceled only when they were exposed by the press.

New to office, President Barack Obama expressed shock at the practices of these institutions and moved to limit the pay of senior executives (who were being so lavishly rewarded with salary and bonuses while their companies bled money). Few believed, however, that Wall Street would change its practices to accommodate Main Street opinion. Most believed that the companies would somehow find ways to hide their excesses and continue their traditional practices.

Work Cited

“McCaskill Proposes Compensation Cap for Private Companies Getting Federal Dollars,” *Senate Newsroom*, 30 Jan. 2009. Web. 9 Feb. 2009.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT: _____



PRACTICE 2 Reading to Summarize

Read Kelli Whitehead’s essay on pages 213–14 and mark it according to the four steps of Reading to Summarize.



The Writing Process for Summaries

Use the following checklist to help you write summaries.

CHECKLIST: HOW TO WRITE A SUMMARY

STEPS	HOW TO DO THE STEPS
<input type="checkbox"/> Focus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about why you are writing the summary and for whom. How much information will your audience need?
<input type="checkbox"/> Read the selection carefully.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underline the main idea, the major support, and the conclusion(s), noting each in the margin.
<input type="checkbox"/> Write a short statement about what you have read.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your own words, write what is important about the piece.
<input type="checkbox"/> Reread the sections you underlined and annotated, along with your written statement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make additional notes or annotations.
<input type="checkbox"/> For an essay-length summary, make an outline.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a thesis statement with the name of what you are summarizing. • Arrange the support points in the order you will mention them.
<input type="checkbox"/> Draft the summary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to the original piece, but use your own words. • Work in the points you have annotated, using your outline if you wrote one.
<input type="checkbox"/> Revise the summary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read your draft, making sure it includes the main point and major support. • Add transitions to move readers smoothly from one point to another. • Make sure the summary is all in your own words.
<input type="checkbox"/> Edit your work. (See Parts 4 through 7 of this book.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check for errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
<input type="checkbox"/> Ask yourself:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does my paper have the Four Basics of a Good Summary (p. 279)?

Summary Assignments

Choose one of the following assignments, and complete it using the previous checklist.

- Using your notes from Practice 1, write a summary of the piece in Practice 1.
- Summarize a section of a textbook from one of your other courses.
- Summarize an editorial from a print or online magazine or newspaper.

- Summarize an entry from a blog that you have read.
- Summarize the plot of a movie or television program.
- Summarize one of the essays in Chapters 10–18 under “Read and Analyze.”

Write a Report

A **report** usually begins with a short summary of a piece of writing, a conversation, or a situation. Then, it analyzes the information, providing reactions, opinions, or recommendations. Unlike a summary, a report often includes the writer’s opinions.

TIP Note that the present tense is used to describe the action in essays and literary works.

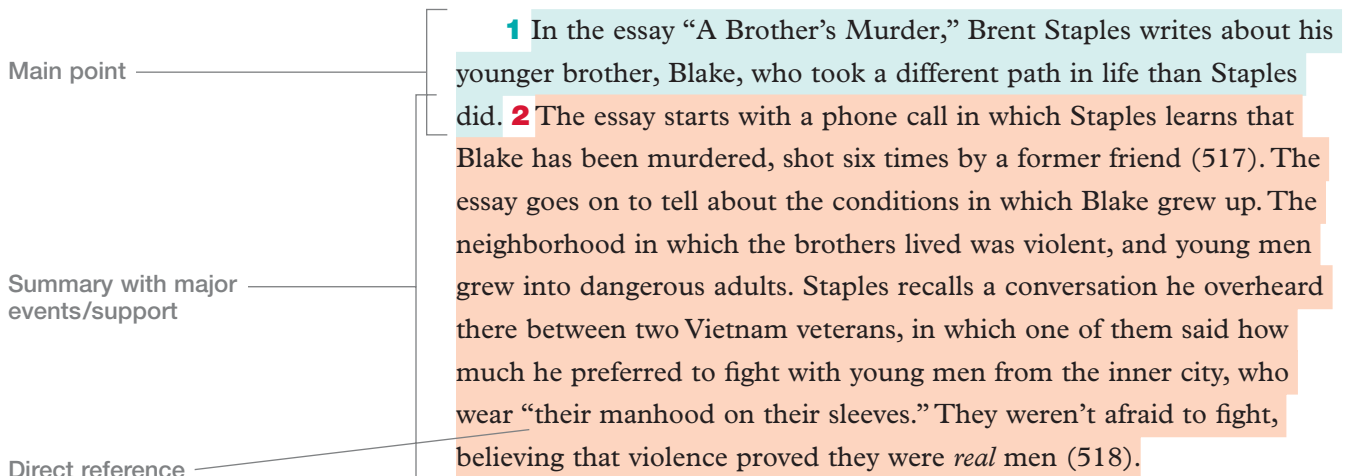


Four Basics of a Good Report

- 1** It states the title and author of the piece in the first sentence or paragraph.
- 2** It summarizes the original piece, conversation, or event, including the main idea and major support points.
- 3** It then moves to the writer’s reactions to the piece and reasons for those reactions.
- 4** It has a conclusion that usually includes a general comment from the writer. The writer may give an opinion (such as whether the piece is good or bad) or make a general observation.

NOTE: Reports often use specific passages or quotations from a piece. For more information on citing and documenting source material, see Chapter 20.

“A Brother’s Murder”: A Painful Story That Is as True as Ever



The author leaves the neighborhood to go to college, and he never returns. Blake, however, stays, and the author recalls a visit home when he sees that his brother has been transformed and now hangs out with drug dealers and gangs (518). When Staples notices a wound on his brother's hand, Blake shrugs it off as "kickback from a shotgun" (519). The author wants to help his brother and makes a date to see him the next night (519). Blake does not show up, and the author returns to Chicago, where he lives. Sometime later, he gets the phone call that announces Blake's death, and he regrets that he had not done something to help his brother.

Direct reference

Summary with major events/support

3 "A Brother's Murder" is a moving and sad story about how men growing up in the inner city are destroyed. Although the essay was written in 1986, its message is at least as true today as it was more than twenty years ago. Staples shows how his brother is sucked into the routine violence of the streets, shooting and being shot because that is what he knows and that is how a man shows he is a man.

4 Today, thousands of young men live this life and die before they are thirty. This essay makes me wonder why this continues, but it also makes me wonder how two brothers could go such different ways. What happened to save Brent Staples? Could he have saved Blake? What can we do to stop the violence? "A Brother's Murder" is an excellent and thought-provoking essay about a dangerous and growing societal problem.

Writer's reaction in conclusion

Work Cited

Staples, Brent. "A Brother's Murder." *Outlooks and Insights: A Reader for College Writers*. Ed. Paul Eschholz and Alfred Rosa. 4th ed. Bedford/St. Martin's: 1995. 284–87. Print.

You may need to write a report in a number of situations:

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| COLLEGE | You are assigned to write a book report. |
| WORK | You have to write a report on a patient's condition.
You are asked to report on a product or service your company is considering. |
| EVERYDAY LIFE | You write an e-mail to a friend reporting on how your first months of college are going. |

The Reading Process for Reports

Reading to write a report is like reading to write a summary except that, in the last step, you write your response to the piece instead of just noting what is important about it.

READING TO REPORT

1. Double-underline the main point and write “main point” in the margin next to it.
2. Underline each major support point (may be a sentence or a group of sentences). For each, write “major support” in the margin.
3. Underline the final observations, recommendations, or conclusions, and write “conclusion” in the margin.
4. After you finish reading, write a sentence or two, in your own words, about how you responded to the piece and why.

PRACTICE 3 Reading to Report

Read the essay “Blood Type and Personality” on pages 200–01. Then, mark whichever essay you select according to the four steps of Reading to Report.

The Writing Process for Reports

Use the following checklist to help you write reports.

CHECKLIST: HOW TO WRITE A REPORT	
STEPS	HOW TO DO THE STEPS
<input type="checkbox"/> Focus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about why you are writing the report and for whom. What do you think of the piece, and how can you get that view across to readers?
<input type="checkbox"/> Read the selection carefully.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underline the main idea, the major support, and the conclusion(s), noting each in the margin.
<input type="checkbox"/> Write a short statement about what you have read.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your own words, write your reactions to the piece and reasons for those reactions.
<input type="checkbox"/> Reread your underlinings, marginal notes, and reactions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make additional notes, and look for specific statements from the piece you might use in your report.
<input type="checkbox"/> For an essay-length report, make an outline.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a thesis statement with the name of what you are reporting on. • Arrange the support points in the order you will mention them. • Put your reactions last.
<input type="checkbox"/> Draft the report.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to the original piece, but use your own words. • Start with a summary, including the major support points. • Work from your outline if you wrote one, including your reactions.

CHECKLIST: HOW TO WRITE A REPORT

STEPS	HOW TO DO THE STEPS
<input type="checkbox"/> Revise the report.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure your draft includes a main point and major support. • Make sure that your response is clear and that you give reasons for your response. • Add transitions to move readers smoothly from one point to another. • Make sure the report (aside from quotations) is all in your own words.
<input type="checkbox"/> Edit your work. (See Parts 4 through 7 of this book.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check for errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
<input type="checkbox"/> Ask yourself:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does my paper have the Four Basics of a Good Report (p. 284)?

Report Assignments

Complete one of the following assignments, using the checklist above.

- Using your notes from Practice 3, write a report on “Blood Type and Personality.”
- Report on a movie or a concert you have seen recently.
- Report on an event in your community.
- Report on an article in a print or online magazine or news source.
- Report on one of the essays in Chapters 10–18.

Chapter Review

1. How is a summary different from a report? _____

2. What are the Four Basics of a Good Summary?

3. How do the Four Basics of a Good Report differ from the basics in question 2? _____