

How to Write a 1-page Summary – Some Guidelines

I Formatting issues

1. In the header, supply the following information [fill in as needed]:

[name of university] – [department] – [term] – [seminar title & number] – [primary instructor] – short summary for session on [date] – author: [your name]

For the header, use font size 10.

2. At the bottom of the page, provide the complete bibliographical reference of the text you summarize (again, font size 10).
3. For the summary itself, use font size 12 and a standard font (e.g. Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri, Garamond). If you are up for it, use a line spacing of 1.5. You cannot go over one page, though. If you find this hard (and it is), use single space.
4. Keep 1 inch **side margins** for comments. On the left margin, I add comments pertaining to content, on the right margin, I (typically) comment on spelling, punctuation, and reference ambiguities. **Top and bottom margins** should be at least half an inch each.

II Structure, Clarity, Common Pitfalls

1. Form complete English sentences.
2. Mind your punctuation and spelling – don't forget to proof-read your summary.
3. Start your summary with a short introductory sentence that introduces the topic.
4. Focus on the argumentative structure of the text you summarize and cut everything else. What are the author's main claims? How are they connected? What arguments does the author adduce to support them? (Space permitting: are they compelling? If not, why not?)
5. Make sure it is always clear to your reader whose claims you are talking about – yours, the author's, or perhaps an opponent's objections that the author addresses?
6. Don't provide a re-narration of the text you summarize. Avoid words like 'then,' 'next,' etc., i.e. words expressing a temporal ordering. Instead, use words that indicate how claims hang together, e.g. 'thus,' 'therefore,' 'but,' 'if ... then,' 'conversely,' etc.
7. When using 'but,' 'however,' 'therefore,' 'yet,' 'still,' 'hence,' etc. – always ask yourself: do I really want to express what these words express? Will my reader understand why my sentence that involves e.g. a 'but' expresses a tension with what I have said before? Does my sentence that contains e.g. a 'thus' really follow from what I have previously stated?
8. Get rid off fluff – e.g. 'like,' 'well,' 'in order to,' ['to' typically suffices] – and avoid hedging wherever possible ('it seems,' 'apparently,' 'maybe,' 'perhaps,' 'I feel'). Instead, make bold claims and attribute to the author claims you believe they make. Generally, avoid unnecessary words.
9. Mind your prepositions. Nothing can e.g. be **based off of* or *based around* anything.
10. Use technical terms you find in the text, but also briefly explain them. Ideally, someone who is not taking the course (a friend, your father, or grandmother) can read your text and grasp what is going on.
11. When done writing, reread the text sentence by sentence. Always ask yourself: do verb and subject fit? For instance: "This theory explains..." Stop right there. Theories don't explain anything – they can't. People do. In doing so they may *rely* or *draw on* theories.
12. Put the text aside for a day or two. Read it again. Do you still understand what you were trying to say? Mark the sentences where you don't and rewrite. Alternatively, ask a friend to mark passages where they can't follow your train of thought.

This is hard. You may not succeed the first time. But the more you practice, the more your writing will improve. Don't get frustrated. Just try your best. Try challenging yourself (how many words can I get rid of?!). This can be fun! Also: I am here to help.

Good luck!