

How to write a summary

Remember that a summary and a paraphrase are closely related concepts:

- Both take a longer piece written by someone else and condense it into fewer words
- Both are written *in your own words*, without the use of any quotations from the original author.

The difference between a summary and a paraphrase is that a summary condenses the whole source text, while a paraphrase just condenses a short passage, like a paragraph or a couple of long sentences.

What belongs in a summary and what doesn't?

In order to write the summary, you will write, in your own words, the author's claim and supporting reasons only. You will not include any of the author's evidence in the summary.

How can you identify the author's claim?

It's not always straightforward. In your argument essay, you included your claim in an easy to find thesis sentence at the end of the first paragraph. Professional writers don't always write that way. A claim may be directly stated at any point in the article, or it may only be implied by the argument the author is making. Some authors may put their claim in the article's title, so check there first.

How can you identify the author's supporting reasons?

While professional writers don't follow the same formulas that we follow in college writing, there's one thing they tend to do the same as we have done in this class. Remember that in your argument essay, you were supposed to give a supporting reason, then present the evidence for that reason? You can expect that your article's author has probably done the same thing. Look for evidence in the article, then look immediately before the evidence and you will likely find a supporting reason.

These short articles will probably only have 2-3 supporting reasons.

What does evidence look like?

Evidence can take several forms in your articles. It may be any of the following:

Quotes from other people

Facts

Statistics

The author's own observations or personal experience

Anecdotes about either the author or another person

Hypothetical examples - made up, but must plausible or realistic

Keep in mind that evidence doesn't belong in the summary, but you need to identify it in order to locate the author's supporting reasons, which should come somewhere before the evidence in the article.

If you can identify a claim, and 2-3 supporting reasons, then you can write a competent summary of the article for your rhetorical analysis essay.

Remember, no quotes in a summary! Use your own words only to describe the author's argument.

For an example of how to summarize an author's article, read Walter Rhein's "[Speaking Spanish in America](#)" and the summary below.

Rhein's argument is that it's not un-American to speak Spanish in America because it is part of capitalism to trade with foreign nations, including the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin and South America. In addition, Americans are taught to respect grandparents, and many Americans have grandparents that don't speak English, like the author's children. Rhein feels that some people wrongly believe that it's disrespectful to speak Spanish in America, but he also feels that only a weak or bullying person would attack women and children for it while failing to address the 6ft tall 225 pound Spanish-speaking Rhein.