

**CHAPTER 3****WRITING A SUMMARY****LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Students will be able to do the following:

- ☐ State in own words the central idea and major supporting details of a written text by using guidelines for rhetorical analysis.
- ☐ Participate in class discussion or hand in a written work that summarizes an article.

MindTap

Start with a warm-up activity, and review the chapter Learning Objectives.

WRITING A SUMMARY

Students often must write both informal exercises and formal papers based on readings in their textbooks. In writing assignments for the course using this textbook, for instance, you will find frequent use for information or ideas discussed in the readings. For formal writing assignments, you may be instructed to choose among the writing topics that end each chapter in Part Two, or you may be asked to suggest your own topic for a paper on a reading or readings. You may choose to argue in favor of or against a position another author takes; you may use information from one or more of the readings to write an essay suggested by a particular chapter; you may decide to compare and contrast two or more essays in a chapter or explain various perspectives on an issue. At some point, you may want to use some of the readings from this or another textbook in combination with other print and Internet resources in a research paper. This chapter and the next three introduce several specific types of assignments that you may be asked to write. This chapter focuses on the summary.

Summarizing produces an objective restatement of a written passage in your own words, in a much shorter version than the original. The purpose of a

summary, sometimes called a **précis**, is to highlight both the central idea or ideas and the major points of a work. A summary does not attempt to restate the entire reading. You might summarize an entire book in the space of a paragraph or perhaps even a sentence, although you will not do full justice to a lengthy work that way.

Many writing assignments call for summarizing. Your instructor may ask you to write a summary of an essay, or a passage from one, to gauge your understanding. Such an assignment may be informal, something that you write in class as a quiz or an ungraded journal entry, or you may be assigned a formal summary, a longer piece that you write out of class in detail and with care. Many kinds of writing include summaries as part of the development of their main ideas. For instance, if you are asked to report on an individual or group research project for a science class, you will probably summarize your purpose, methodology, data, and conclusions. If you write an argumentative paper, you may need to summarize either opposing viewpoints or your own supporting evidence. A research paper often includes summaries of information from source materials, and the research process itself necessitates summarizing portions of what you read. Reviews of books or articles almost always include summaries of the works under discussion, and essay questions on an examination often require summaries of information or data. Across the curriculum, no matter what course you are taking, you will probably be asked to summarize.

Summaries serve useful purposes. Professors summarize as they lecture in order to convey information in a condensed way when a detailed review would take far too much time. Textbook chapters often present summaries of chapter contents as part of chapter introductions (as in Part Two of this textbook). In this textbook, some of the questions for small-group and class discussion following the readings ask you to summarize major points or portions of readings in order to facilitate your understanding of the text. That process, in turn, enhances the quality of your classroom experience and develops your abilities to follow the discussion intelligently and to make useful contributions to the discussion yourself. Your instructor may ask you to write a summary of a piece you have read as a formal assignment. Summarizing is also an excellent strategy to enhance your own study habits. After reading an assignment for any of your courses, try to write a summary of the reading. If you cannot put into your own words the major ideas of what you have just read, you may need to go back and reread the material.

Outside the classroom and the academic environment, summaries routinely give brief introductions, overviews, and conclusions of subjects at hand. In business, industry, law, medicine, scientific research, government, or any other field, both managers and workers often need quick summaries to familiarize themselves with the high points or essence of information. Knowing how to summarize accurately is a useful skill in both your academic writing and your profession or job.

A Summary Is Not a Substitute for Analysis. Do not mistakenly assume that putting another person's words into your own words is an analysis. Instead, a **summary** is a **brief, concise, objective restatement of the important elements of a piece of writing of any length**, from a paragraph to an entire book. A summary may be brief, as in a one-paragraph abstract that precedes a report or long paper and gives a very



short overview of it, or it may be several paragraphs or even pages in length, depending on the length of the writing or writings being summarized. You may summarize as an informal exercise for your own purposes or as a formal assignment that you hand in to your instructor for evaluation.

Abstract. An abstract, like all summaries, is a condensed, objective restatement of the essential points of a text. Its distinguishing characteristic is its brevity. Abstracts are usually quite short, perhaps 100 to 200 words, whereas summaries may be much longer, depending on the length of what is being summarized. As with all summaries, an abstract helps readers determine quickly whether an article or a book will be of interest or use. It can also serve as a brief guide to the key points before reading an article or as an aid in recalling the contents of the piece after reading it. You will almost always find an abstract before the beginning of a research paper or an article in the sciences. Following this is the abstract that precedes a research paper by Laurel Yahi titled “Effects of His Mother’s Death on Joseph’s Social and Emotional Development.” This abstract provides a broad overview of her paper, including her major points and conclusions. In her paper, she discusses or develops each of these components at length, providing examples and supporting evidence where necessary. In 161 words, the abstract condenses a paper of more than 2,000 words to its most essential points. You can see how an abstract, like summaries of other lengths, is useful for getting a quick overview of a report or an essay.

MindTap Read, highlight, and take notes online.

Effects of His Mother’s Death on Joseph’s Social and Emotional Development

LAUREL YAHİ

Abstract

Four-year-old Joseph suddenly lost his mother two years ago. I have observed Joseph in my home daycare for 50 hours a week since his mother's death. With ample opportunity to observe him in this natural setting, I set about determining whether his mother's death might have long-term effects on Joseph's social and emotional development. At play, when working alone, at lunch time, and nap time, Joseph's cognitive abilities, vocabulary skills, willingness to listen to and obey adults, and social interaction skills appear normal for his age. He is well liked by the other children in the daycare. His progress, determination to learn, and intellectual growth all reflect a natural resiliency that lets him grow and mature without serious developmental problems. With a strong support system and a loving family, he should be able to grow into a healthy adult with no lasting negative effects on his ability to form relationships and participate fully in social settings, and enjoy good emotional health.



Formal and Informal Summaries. Informal summaries are primarily for personal use and are usually not handed in for evaluation by an instructor. Formal summaries are those that others will read and are sometimes graded assignments. In either case, the process for writing a summary is virtually the same. Although the process is the same for both an assignment that you will hand in to your instructor and a summary for your own use, a formal summary requires the kind of care that you give to longer writing assignments. The following directions will help you prepare and draft your formal summary:

Prewriting

1. Begin by carefully reading the work. Make a mental note of its thesis or main idea, but do not write anything in the margins yet. If you try to highlight for a summary on your first reading, you might end up underlining or noting too many things. Wait until you have read the entire selection through once before writing anything.
2. After your first reading, write in your own words the thesis or central idea as you understand it. Then go back to the article, locate the thesis or main idea, underline it, and compare it with the sentence you wrote. If your sentence differs from the sentence(s) you underlined, rephrase your own sentence.
3. Next, read the article again, this time looking for major points of development or illustration of the thesis. As you reread, make marginal notes and underline, circle, or in some way mark the key supporting points or major ideas in the development of the thesis.
4. After you have finished reading, look at your notes and state in one sentence, in your own words, the thesis and each major point. Do not include details or minor supporting evidence unless leaving them out would misrepresent or unfairly represent what you are summarizing. If the writing you are summarizing comes to any important conclusions, note them as well in one sentence in your own words.
5. If you are still unclear about which are major and which are minor points, give the piece another reading. The more you read it, the better you understand its purpose, method of development, and major points.

Writing Your Summary

1. In your opening sentence, state the author's full name, the title of the work, and the thesis or main idea. Write in complete sentences, whether your summary is 100 words or 500 words long.
2. Use the author's last name when referring to what he or she says in the article or when quoting the author directly.
3. Use attributive tags throughout; that is, use words and phrases that attribute or point to your source. Such tags serve the purpose of reminding your readers who you are quoting or summarizing. They may take the form of the author's last name or pronouns referring to the author, credentials of the author, published source of the material, or other information that identifies the author (for example, "Wright, in his *Wired* Magazine article, argues that").



4. Do not use the exact words of the author unless you use quotation marks around those words. The summary must use your own wording. Use direct quotations sparingly, and only for a significant word, phrase, or sentence. Make sure that anything you put in quotation marks uses the exact wording of the article.
5. Use present tense to describe or explain what the author has written ("Wright explains" or "Wright concludes").
6. Provide clear transitions from point to point, just as you would in a longer assignment, and write in clear, coherent language.
7. Edit what you have written before turning it in to your instructor.

The key to summarizing accurately is knowing what is important and therefore must be included, and what is secondary and therefore should be omitted. Here you see the usefulness of the guidelines for critical reading. When you read critically, you identify the main idea or thesis of the selection, and you highlight or in some way mark major points. A summary must include the main idea of what you are summarizing, and it should include major points, and only major points. Thus, if you learn to read critically, you can write a summary.

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A SUMMARY

- ☐ On your first reading, mentally note the thesis or central idea of the work or passage you are summarizing without writing anything down.
- ☐ After your first reading, write down your understanding of the thesis, locate the thesis in the work, underline it, check what you have written against it, and adjust your own sentence if necessary.
- ☐ Now reread the work, noting key points, either in the margin, by highlighting, or on a separate piece of paper.
- ☐ When you have finished your second reading, once again write in your own words a one-sentence summary of the thesis or central idea. Use the author's name and title of the reading in that sentence.
- ☐ Write in your own words a one-sentence summary of each major point the author has used to develop, illustrate, or support the thesis or central idea. State only essential details related to each major point.
- ☐ Do not include minor points unless you believe their omission would give an unfair representation of what you are summarizing.
- ☐ Where appropriate, write in your own words a one-sentence summary of any conclusion from the piece.
- ☐ Use attributive tags throughout your summary.
- ☐ Keep your summary short, succinct, and focused on the central idea and major points of the piece you are summarizing.
- ☐ Edit for grammar, punctuation, and spelling before handing in your assignment.



EXERCISE

Read “Dream Machines” by Will Wright, take notes, and write a summary of it. The personal response and questions for class or small-group discussion that follow the article may help you write your summary. Your instructor may want you to hand in your work or use it as part of a class or small-group discussion of the article.

**DREAM
MACHINES**

WILL WRIGHT

Will Wright has created more than a dozen games, beginning with SimCity in 1989, but he is perhaps best known for The Sims (2000). Wright was awarded a lifetime achievement award by Game Developers Choice in 2001. His latest software game series, Spore, is based on the model of evolution and scientific advancement. This article first appeared in Wired.

The human imagination is an amazing thing. As children, we spend much of our time in imaginary worlds, substituting toys and make-believe for the real surroundings that we are just beginning to explore and understand. As we play, we learn. And as we grow, our play gets more complicated. We add rules and goals. The result is something we call games.

Now an entire generation has grown up with a different set of games than any before it and it plays these games in different ways. Just watch kids with a new videogame. The last thing they do is read the manual. Instead, they pick up the controller and start mashing buttons to see what happens. This isn't a random process; it's the essence of the scientific method. Through trial and error, players build a model of the underlying game based on empirical evidence collected through play. As the players refine this model, they begin to master the game world. It's a rapid cycle of hypothesis, experiment, and analysis. And it's a fundamentally different take on problem-solving than the linear, read-the-manual-first approach of their parents.

In an era of structured education and standardized testing, this generational difference might not yet be evident. But the gamers' mindset—the fact that they are learning in a totally



new way—means they'll treat the world as a place for creation, not consumption. This is the true impact videogames will have on our culture.

Society, however, notices only the negative. Most people on the far side of the generational divide—elders—look at games and see a list of ills (they're violent, addictive, childish, worthless). Some of these labels may be deserved. But the positive aspects of gaming—creativity, community, self-esteem, problem-solving—are somehow less visible to nongamers.

I think part of this stems from the fact that watching someone play a game is a different experience than actually holding the controller and playing it yourself. Vastly different. Imagine that all you knew about movies was gleaned through observing the audience in a theater—but that you had never watched a film. You would conclude that movies induce lethargy and junk-food binges. That may be true, but you're missing the big picture.

So it's time to reconsider games, to recognize what's different about them and how they benefit—not denigrate—culture. Consider, for instance, their “possibility space”: Games usually start at a well-defined state (the setup in chess, for instance) and end when a specific state is reached (the king is checkmated). Players navigate this possibility space by their choices and actions; every player's path is unique.

Games cultivate—and exploit—possibility space better than any other medium. In linear storytelling, we can only imagine the possibility space that surrounds the narrative: What if Luke had joined the Dark Side? What if Neo isn't the One? In interactive media, we can explore it.

Like the toys of our youth, modern videogames rely on the player's active involvement. We're invited to create and interact with elaborately simulated worlds, characters, and story lines. Games aren't just fantasy worlds to explore; they actually amplify our powers of imagination.

Think of it this way: Most technologies can be seen as an enhancement of some part of our bodies (car/legs, house/skin, TV/senses). From the start, computers have been understood as an extension of the human brain; the first computers were referred to as mechanical brains and analytical engines. We saw their primary value as automated number crunchers that far exceeded our own meager abilities.

But the Internet has morphed what we used to think of as a fancy calculator into a fancy telephone with email, chat

groups, IM, and blogs. It turns out that we don't use computers to enhance our math skills—we use them to expand our people skills.

The same transformation is happening in games. Early computer games were little toy worlds with primitive graphics and simple problems. It was up to the player's imagination to turn the tiny blobs on the screen into, say, people or tanks. As computer graphics advanced, game designers showed some Hollywood envy: They added elaborate cutscenes, epic plots, and, of course, increasingly detailed graphics. They bought into the idea that world building and storytelling are best left to professionals, and they pushed out the player. But in their rapture over computer processing, games designers forgot that there's a second processor at work: the player's imagination.

Now, rather than go Hollywood, some game designers are deploying that second processor to break down the wall between producers and consumers. By moving away from the idea that media is something developed by the few (movie and TV studios, book publishers, game companies) and consumed in a one-size-fits-all form, we open up a world of possibilities. Instead of leaving player creativity at the door, we are inviting it back to help build, design, and populate our digital worlds.

More games now include features that let players invent some aspect of their virtual world, from characters to cars. And more games entice players to become creative partners in world building, letting them mod its overall look and feel. The online communities that form around these imaginative activities are some of the most vibrant on the Web. For these players, games are not just entertainment but a vehicle for self-expression.

Games have the potential to subsume almost all other forms of entertainment media. They can tell us stories, offer us music, give us challenges, allow us to communicate and interact with others, encourage us to make things, connect us to new communities, and let us play. Unlike most other forms of media, games are inherently malleable. Player mods are just the first step down this path.

Soon games will start to build simple models of us, the players. They will learn what we like to do, what we're good at, what interests and challenges us. They will observe us. They will record the decisions we make, consider how we solve problems, and evaluate how skilled we are in various circumstances. Over time, these games will become able

to modify themselves to better “fit” each individual. They will adjust their difficulty on the fly, bring in new content, and create story lines. Much of this original material will be created by other players, and the system will move it to those it determines will enjoy it most.

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Games are evolving to entertain, educate, and engage us individually. These personalized games will reflect who we are and what we enjoy, much as our choice of books and music does now. They will allow us to express ourselves, meet others, and create things that we can only dimly imagine. They will enable us to share and combine these creations, to build vast playgrounds. And more than ever, games will be a visible, external amplification of the human imagination.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

Comment on your own experience with game-playing. If you are a player, explain its appeal; if you are not a player, explain why you think it does not appeal to you.

Questions for Class or Small-Group Discussion

1. Wright comments that society, especially “elders,” sees only the negative effects of videogames (paragraph 4). What are those negative effects? Can you account for this view that videogames have a negative effect on the culture? In your experience, is Wright correct that “elders” view videogames negatively?
2. State in your own words what you understand Wright to mean when he says that “it’s time to reconsider games, to recognize . . . how they benefit—not denigrate—culture” (paragraph 6).
3. Explain what you understand Wright to mean by the phrase “possibility space” (paragraph 7).
4. How effective do you find Wright’s argument? What evidence or supporting proof does he supply? Do you think that his argument would convince those who have only negative opinions about videogames?

MindTap

Reflect, personalize, and apply what you've learned.

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