

Summarizing: Activities

S-3 Practice in Summarizing

Follow the individual directions for each exercise, and complete the exercises on a separate sheet of paper. Because summarizing the writing of others, particularly professional or technical writing, can be a difficult task in itself, the following activity is designed to give you practice, at first, with summarizing alone. Information about the source will be included in the next activity, S-4. To minimize the tendency to follow the original wording too closely, have someone read the passages aloud to you; then, without looking at the passages, summarize *using your own wording and phrasing*.

1. Write a one-sentence summary of the following passage:

Until just a few years ago, making a baby boy or a baby girl was pretty much a hit-or-miss affair. Not anymore. Parents who have access to the latest genetic testing techniques can now predetermine their baby's sex with great accuracy.

2. Write a one-sentence summary of the following passage:

Children of divorce have no choice. If the parent with whom they live, usually the mother, has to or wants to work, the children must pick up some of the slack. It doesn't usually hurt them. In fact, many adults of divorce, in retrospect, say that the arrangement worked amazingly well and propelled them on the road to competence and independence as an adult.

3. Write a one-sentence summary of the following passage:

Critics on both left and right have complained that America is awash in talk about rights. No political debate proceeds for very long without one side, or both, resting its argument on rights—property rights, welfare rights, women's rights, nonsmokers' rights, the right to life, abortion rights, gay rights, gun rights, you name it.

4. Write a two-sentence summary of the following passage:

We should not hide the fact that Columbus and other European explorers were often brutal. But there was also brutality in indigenous cultures—as well as much to be admired. And there was much to praise about Europeans as well, who did, after all, bring with them the foundations for our legal, educational, and political institutions. But instead of being encouraged to search for complicated

truth, students are increasingly presented with oversimple versions of the American past that focus on the negative.

5. Write a three-sentence summary of the following passage:

Rhythm and blues is a form of black popular music dating from the 1940s and extending into the late 1960s and 1970s when it became known as "soul music." It is the main force linking black popular music with rock 'n' roll, rock, and other popular styles. R & B, as it is also called, is derived from earlier forms, especially the blues, the dominant mode of vocal and instrumental music among rural blacks during the early years of the 20th century. Another prime influence was black gospel music, which helped shape the style of performance and contributed to the tendency toward group singing, which persists. Emphasis on pronounced rhythms suitable for dancing is reflected in its name.

6. Write a two-sentence summary of the following passage:

The key element in any attempt at humor is conflict. Our brain is suddenly jolted into trying to accept something that is unacceptable. The punch line of a joke is the part that conflicts with the first part, thereby surprising us and throwing our synapses into some kind of fire drill.

7. Write a three-sentence summary of the following passage:

Out-of-wedlock births are becoming more common around the globe. In Europe, the proportion of babies born out of wedlock has doubled and tripled in the past twenty years. Many people assume that this is because European welfare states support single mothers (and the poor overall) more generously than the U.S. government does. And this belief is prevalent in a more extreme form: Some people believe that unwed mothers (especially teens) get pregnant and have a baby just to get a welfare check, and that consequently it's not surprising that European countries have increasing rates. But all industrialized countries, including the United States, are cutting back on welfare provision as a result of the tightening global economy, and out-of-wedlock births have responded by *increasing*.

8. Write a two-sentence summary of the following passage:

The use of scorpion venom to fight glioma, a form of brain cancer, complements other scientific research in recent years on how animal poisons can be useful in treating human diseases. For example, a protein found in snake venom that causes victims to bleed to death can, in small doses, stop blood from clotting and could be an effective treatment for heart disease and stroke.

9. Write a two-sentence summary of the following passage:

When pain control is done correctly, it almost never has the side effect of hastening the patient's death. There are board-certified pain-control specialists who know how to properly set dosage and increase it if necessary as the pain worsens. People do not become addicted or permanently doped up under those circumstances.

10. Write a one-sentence summary of the following passage:

Mercy killing is defended by proponents as death with dignity when, in fact, it is an act that unfairly exploits fear of pain, suffering, indignity, abandonment, and loss of control.

S-4 Practice in Documenting Summaries

For each of the following exercises, use your summary sentences from section S-3 and include appropriate documentation as indicated, in either MLA or APA style. When creating lead-ins, use present tense verbs such as *claims*, *reports*, *notes*, *states*.

1. Put all necessary information for documentation in parentheses.

Lemonick, Michael D. "Designer Babies." *Time* 11 Jan. 2013: 64–65. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 27 Feb. 2008. (Text retrieved from this electronic database was a photocopy of article as it was originally printed. Excerpt is from page 64. See section S-2, guideline 7.)

Example

MLA: The truly humorous American writer reveals the stupidity and silliness of human behavior (Schmitz 3).

APA: . . . silliness of human behavior (Schmitz, 2013, p. 3).

2. Put all information for documentation in the narrative of the text (or lead-in).

Beal, Edward W., and Gloria Hochman. "Adult Children of Divorce." *Parenting*. Nov. 2008: 23–37. *ABI-INFORM*. Web. 22 Mar. 2009. (Text retrieved from this electronic database does not have page numbers even though the original article is paginated. See section S-2, guideline 7.)

Example

MLA: In their article "Uranus," Gibbons and Amos state that for more than four billion years temperatures on the surface of Uranus have not risen above minus 346°F.

APA: In their 2013 article "Uranus," Gibbons and Amos state. . . .

3. Put information for documentation partly in the narrative of the text (or lead-in) and partly in parentheses using paragraph reference instead of page reference for this electronic source. (See section S-2, guideline 7.) In your research, you have discovered that David Boaz is a professor of political science. Assume that this is the first time you are using this source, and you want to include this information in your lead-in to clarify for your readers who this person is and why his ideas are important.

Boaz, David. *Libertarianism*. June 2008. 16 pars. *Google Scholar*. Web. 12 May 2009. (Excerpt is from paragraph 6.)

Example

MLA: In *Of Huck and Alice*, Neil Schmitz, author of several books about American humor, states that the truly humorous writer deals with life's tragedies (par. 10).

APA: In *Of Huck and Alice*, Schmitz (2009), author of several books about American humor, states . . . tragedies (par. 10).

4. Put information for documentation partly in the narrative of the text (or lead-in) and partly in parentheses, because that is the best way to handle a summary of more than one sentence.

Cheney, Lynne V. *Telling the Truth*. New York: Simon, 2005. Print. (Excerpt is from page 94.)

Example

MLA: Schaller, Blair, and Phelps claim that the first live panda to reach the United States arrived in 1936. It was eventually acquired by the Chicago Zoo (286).

APA: Schaller, Blair, and Phelps (2011) claim . . . Chicago Zoo (p. 286).

5. Frame this summary with source information at the beginning and end. (See section S-2, guideline 3.) [*Hint:* Since this encyclopedia entry lists no author, you must document the source by its title. Also, page numbers are unavailable with this online source, so the second citation is required to indicate where your summary ends. Note that in the following example the second internal documentation ("According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica . . .") makes it clear that the entire passage is from a source by providing a frame at the end.]

"Rhythm and Blues." *Encyclopaedia Americana Online*. Encyclopaedia Americana Foundation, 2007. Web. 12 July 2011.

Example

MLA: The encyclopedia entry "Newton, Sir Isaac" points out that the scientific revolution in England reached its high point with Newton's theory of gravity. He was a member of the Royal Society, founded in 1622. According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, the primary purpose of this organization was to serve as a forum for scientific discussions on theories such as Newton's.

APA: The encyclopedia entry "Newton, Sir Isaac" (2011) points out that. . . . According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online* . . . such as Newton's.

6. Put information for documentation partly in the narrative and partly in parentheses. Assume that this is the first time you are using this source. In your research, you have discovered that Gary Larson is an internationally acclaimed cartoonist and the author of *Far Side* cartoons.

Larson, Gary. *The PreHistory of the Far Side*. Kansas City, MO: Andrews, 2007. Print. (Excerpt is from page 160.)

Example

MLA: Cliff Tarpy, author of *San Francisco Bay* and TV weatherman, explains how the warm coastal waters moderate the climate and cause the well-known San Francisco fog. In the summer warm inland air rises, drawing the fog in. In the winter warm ocean air rises, drawing the fog out (23).

APA: Tarpy (2011), author of *San Francisco Bay*. . . . drawing the fog out (p. 23).

7. Put the information for documentation in the narrative of the text (or lead-in). The lead-in should also identify the source as an abstract since abstracts are not from the original text and are often written by someone other than the author. (See section S-2, guideline 6.) Since the abstract itself does not have page numbers, an end frame must be created using a source credit in the last sentence. (See section S-2, guideline 3.)

Luker, Kristin. "The Politics of Teenage Pregnancy." *Teen Parents* 2.3 (2008): 6-7. Abstract. *Ebscohost*. Web. 27 Aug. 2011.

Example

MLA: The abstract of Parker's article "Acid Rain: Rhetoric and Reality" provides several examples of the complexity of the problem of acid rain and the wide spectrum of issues involved. For example, the abstract discusses the complex international implications of acid rain.

APA: The abstract of Parker's (2009) article. . . . For example, the abstract discusses . . . implications of acid rain.

8. Put information for documentation at the beginning and end of your summary to create a frame for this electronic source without page numbers. Use the article title, since no author is listed. (See section S-2, guideline 3.)

"Scorpion Venom May Hold Brain Cancer Cure." *National Geographic Online*. National Geographic. 10 Mar. 2008. Web. 15 Mar. 2009.

Example

MLA: The article "From Cinderella to Harry Potter" presents the complexities of children's stories. The article documents how fantasy stories are often based upon real-life experiences of the author.

APA: "From Cinderella to Harry Potter" (2011) states that. . . . The article documents . . . of the author.

9. Put information for documentation partly in the narrative and partly in parentheses. Assume that this is the first time you are using this source in your paper and that you are using two sources written by this author. (The second source is in the following exercise.) In your research, you have discovered that Wesley Smith is a nationally recognized lawyer who argues against assisted suicide. (*Hint:* In MLA format, it is necessary to mention both author and title to differentiate sources written by the same person.)

Smith, Wesley. "In the Name of Compassion." Interview. By Mark O'Brien. *The Sun* Feb. 2008: 9-14. Print. (Excerpt is from page 11.)

Example

MLA: James D. Darling, a zoologist who has been studying whales for over two decades, concludes that whales are closely related to mammals such as bison, pigs, and cattle. Their mating system and social behavior are very similar ("Whales" 885).

APA: Darling (2012), a zoologist who has . . . are very similar (p. 885).

In APA format, dates will usually identify different works by the same author. If dates happen to be the same, arrange the works alphabetically by title in the references list and place lowercase letters after the year (for example, 2007a and 2007b).