Writing a Summary

What is a written summary?

A written summary is a clear expression that recounts the main points of a text or part of it in a logical order. Since summary is a brief account of the author's major points, it should not contain your opinion or the author's details.

How to distinguish main points from details?

First, ask yourself a question: What is the essay about? The answer to this question can help you to discover the topic. Second, ask yourself: What does the author want me to know about the topic of the essay? The answer to this question can help you to discover the author's main points.

How to find unstated main points?

Sometimes an author will not clearly state his or her main points; major points that are not stated but implied are called unstated major points. To find unstated major points, you need to do some "investigation". Some authors give lots of examples that have one common meaning. Usually these examples are grouped together and represent the unstated major point. So, group the examples in your head and ask yourself what all these examples have in common. That "something" is the author's main point. An author can have many main points within one text; therefore, there are many groupings of details.

How to structure a summary?

- First, your summary should start with a clear introductory sentence, telling your reader who the author is and what the title and the topic of the essay are.
  Examples of introductory sentences are:
  * In the essay “Recipe for a Sick Society”, Donna Britt discusses causes for violence among kids.
  * In the essay “How to Mark a Book”, Mortimer Adler gives suggestions on how to mark a book.
- Next, present the main points of the text in the same order the author presents them to you.
- Further, when you move from presenting one main point to another, use transitions introductory phrases to make your writing clear.
  Examples of transitions and introductory phrases are: first, second, in addition, furthermore, next, moreover, afterwards, finally; the author states, adds, clarifies, claims, proves, suggests, argues for, explains, supports, questions, proposes, recommends, puts forward.

What is a good summary?

- A good summary is written in your own words
- A good summary expresses only main points of the text
- A good summary follows the order of the text
- A good summary has transitions and introductory phrases
- A good summary is brief, clear, and to the point
“How to Mark a Book” by Mortimer Adler

Summary

In his essay “How to Mark a Book”, M. Adler encourages readers to “write between the lines” or to mark a book. He asks; however, not to write in a book that is not yours. The author believes that a person really owns a book and its information if he or she writes in it. Furthermore, the author convinces readers that writing in a book has many advantages. First, writing in a book makes one think. Second, marking up helps one to remember thoughts. Third, writing comments preserves one’s reactions better. Also, the author reminds readers that reading must be active which means that reading should take a form of a conversation between the reader, who is a learner, and the author, who is a teacher. In addition, Adler gives a few useful hints for how to mark up a book. For example, one can underline main points, draw vertical lines at the margin, use stars or asterisks, number the points, circle key words, or write in the margin to record questions or major statements. Moreover, one can write on the front end-papers, insert a scratch pad with notes in the book, or make outlines on the front and back covers. In the end, the author provides his readers with two more useful pieces of advice: to approach each reading differently according to its worth, and to keep a marked book to oneself because a marked copy is an intellectual diary and lending it is almost like giving one’s mind away.