

Examples of Student Summaries

Here's a student summary of a published academic essay called "Sponsors of Literacy":

In her essay "Sponsors of Literacy," Deborah Brandt, professor emeritus of English at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, explores the concept of "literacy sponsors," that is, institutions or individuals that serve to either further or limit others' literacy in their pursuit of economic, political, or social advantage. Ultimately, Brandt "set[s] out a case for why the concept of sponsorship is richly suggestive for exploring economies of literacy and their effects" (167). In other words, she proposes that this concept can serve as a useful lens through which we can examine the economic and political forces that shape a society's literacy. For example, through her analysis of the literacy experiences of a middle-class, "European American" man and a working-class, "Mexican American" woman living in the same U.S. town, she illustrates how literacy sponsorship can help explain the unequal distribution of access to literacy learning and its benefits across ethnic groups and social classes (170).

Here's another student summary of the same academic essay "Sponsors of Literacy":

In "Sponsors of Literacy," Deborah Brandt, acclaimed literacy scholar and researcher, asks: "How are we to understand the vicissitudes of individual literacy development in relation to the large-scale economic forces that set the routes and determine the worldly worth of that literacy?" (166). In other words, she seeks to clarify how the economic value of literacy in a society influences how individuals gain and use that literacy. Brandt's central argument is that the concept of "literacy sponsors" is a means to understand this relationship since sponsors "lend their resources or credibility to the sponsored but also stand to gain from their success, whether by direct repayment or, indirectly, association" (167). For example, in the section "Sponsorship and Access," she demonstrates how access to different literacy sponsors influenced the literacy development of two same-aged individuals from the same town: "For Raymond Branch, a university town in the 1970s and 1980s provided an information-rich, resource-rich environment in which to pursue his literacy development, but for Dora Lopez, a female member of a culturally unsubsidized ethnic minority, the same town at the same time was information- and resource-poor" (Brandt 171).

Notice the use of 1) strong verbs that precisely convey the stance Brandt is taking with respect to the topic, and 2) transitional words and phrases that guide the reader from sentence to sentence.

Summarizing Sources

A summary is a concise overview of a longer piece of writing; this may be a novel, an essay, a section of a piece of writing, or even a paragraph from a longer piece. This is called a *source* in academia. An effective summary helps an unfamiliar reader to accurately understand the main ideas of your sources and the relevance of those sources to your own argument. Typically, an effective summary of an essay or article (or even book) includes:

- 1) the author's full name. Afterwards, only the author's last name should be used. At times, a writer will also state the author's profession, position, or expertise.
- 2) the full name of the essay or article (formatted MLA style) being summarized. It may also be useful to specify the genre of the source e.g. academic article, opinion piece, autobiography, review, etc.
- 3) a description of the author's intellectual project or central question i.e. what s/he is investigating (USEFUL VERBS: *explores, examines, analyzes, investigates, questions, asks*; NOT: *says, writes, is about, looks into*)
- 4) one or two quotes of the author's thesis or central argument (USEFUL VERBS: *argues, asserts, states, proposes, hypothesizes, claims*).
- 5) a paraphrase/explanation/textual example of the author's main point (USEFUL PHRASES: *for example, for instance, in other words*)

NOTE: In doing 3) and 4), a writer typically introduces – and defines if necessary – key terms of the source text.

Question: Based on these guidelines, what would you as a student writer need to know or do BEFORE you can successfully produce a summary of an academic article like "Mother Tongue"?