WR 121

Formal Academic Summary Assignment

What IS an academic summary?

* A summary is a condensed version of a source (such as a published essay) written in your own words. It represents the main points of the original in shortened form.
* Summaries include only major points. They omit specifics such as details, facts, examples or illustrations.
* Summaries use far fewer words than the original text.
* Summaries usually do not follow the organizational pattern of the original text.
* In a standalone academic summary, the ideas are only those of the original source; the author of the summary does not respond, react or comment on the original. You must be objective and neutral, accurately reporting on the source’s main ideas. [A summary within a larger researched essay may be less neutral.]

Typical conventions of an academic summary:

1. **The first sentence of a summary** normally introduces or identifies the name of the author(s) and title of the text being summarized, and the thesis of the text.
2. **The body of the summary** presents the main points, clearly and concisely, in your words:
   1. You cannot include every detail.
   2. Select the main reasons only.
   3. Do not repeat or restate points unnecessarily.
   4. Avoid too many direct quotations: use only if you cannot paraphrase a particular phrase. Avoid quoting ENTIRE sentences in a short, standalone summary.
3. **Summaries typically follow the same order as the original.** While main ideas are given in order, a summary begins with the thesis even if the original source’s thesis is at the end of the text.
4. **Summaries regularly use occasional “author tags”** to remind the reader that you are summarizing someone else’s text/ideas. Do not use “Mr.” or “Mrs.” And only use the author’s first name when you first introduce them; afterwards, use only the last name.
   1. **Simple introductory author tag:** “In an *Audubon* article, “Damning a River,” Mary Gilbert asserts that we should look forward to the day that we publicly dynamite a dam.”
   2. **Simple reminder tag:** “As Gilbert points out in her conclusion….”
5. **Summaries take an objective stance.** You should not offer your opinions of the author’s ideas. Your goal is to capture the author’s ideas so fairly and accurately that if you could show your summary to the author, s/he would agree with you.

6. **Conclude with the author’s conclusion:**  The last sentence of your summary should reflect the author’s conclusion: “Uttaro concludes by reiterating her claim that companies are using the myth of women’s delicate health in order to keep them in lower paying jobs.”

**Steps in Writing a Standalone Academic Summary:**

Step One: **Read the original text carefully and repeatedly.**

* Writing a good summary begins with careful reading of the original.
* Read it more than once.
* Be an active reader, thinking and questioning as you go.
* Annotate/underline the main points or mark them in the margin.
* It is crucial that you fully understand the original source, to know what the author is saying and how he or she is saying it.

Step Two: **List the original text’s thesis and supporting reasons.**

* After you have read the source more than once and believe that you understand it, try making a list of the thesis and main points.
* Try putting the thesis into your own words, and then the main points.
* Check the supporting main ideas/reasons: do they belong in your summary? Why or why not?

Step Three: **Write the first draft of the summary.**

* Begin your draft by identifying the original source and author.
* At this stage, try to set aside the original and concentrate on putting your list of the author supporting reasons into your words.
* If you get stuck, imagine yourself explaining the original to someone who hasn’t read it.

Step Four: **Review the original text and summary draft for accuracy.**

* When you have a full draft, check the original text for accuracy.
* You can also change or omit any words or phrases from the original that may have crept into your writing.
* It is permissible (but rare) to include brief quotations from the original indicated with quotation marks.

Step Five: **Edit for mechanics, grammar, and spelling.**

* Edit your summary for clarity and smoothness.
* Make sure that you have used complete sentences.
* Add transitions to indicate how ideas are connected (there is a transitions handout in this course packet)
* Proofread for errors in spelling, punctuation, or grammar.

**Assignment: Formal Academic Summary**

**Purpose**: As we have discussed in class, a summary of an essay is a condensed version of the main ideas presented in the essay. To write a summary, you need to be able to understand and interpret the ideas, then put that information, in condensed form, in your own words. You should keep direct quotations to a minimum: only when you absolutely cannot express an idea in your own words. A formal academic summary presents information objectively: do not include your opinion in your summary.

**Audience**: Your audience is your instructor and your classmates. Although your readers may be familiar with the text you have chosen, you should thoroughly represent the writer’s main points as if they were not familiar with the text.

**Requirements/Context**: You will be summarizing “Mind Over Mass Media” by Steven Pinker

NOTE: below is a sample MLA bibliographic citation—Works Cited—for Gerald Graff’s article, “Hidden Intellectualism.” Please follow the same format (Work in an anthology) for your summary article, “Mind Over Mass Media” by Steven Pinker. The citation goes *before* the summary.

**Sample bibliographic citation for a work in an anthology:**

**Graff, Gerald. “Hidden Intellectualism.” *Everyone’s An Author with Readings,* edited by Andrea Lunsford, et al., W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2017, pp. 957-962.**

**Reference: EAA (557)**

**Details:**

* Formal Summary due Wednesday, April 10
* Include a bibliographic citation ***at the beginning*** of your summary
* Summary length: 1 page ***maximum***, MLA format