

How to Write a Summary of a Book Chapter

A summary is a concise explanation of the main ideas and supporting details of a work of writing. To decide which details to include in the summary of a book chapter, consider the "who, what, when, where, why, and how" while reading the chapter. Take notes that answer these questions and compile the information into complete sentences.

Main Characters and Setting

Begin your summary by stating the main characters and setting of the chapter in one to two sentences. The main characters are who the story is about. They do most of the acting, feeling, and talking in the chapter. Include information about both the protagonist, the positive main character, and antagonist, the person who opposes the main character, if the chapter includes both of these characters. If the chapter contains supporting characters, such as friends and family members, only include them if they influence the chapter's outcome. The setting of the chapter is when and where the story takes place. The setting can be as specific as Manhattan in June 1965 or as broad as a rural village in the Middle Ages.

Main Theme

The main idea is the main theme of the chapter. To determine what it is, consider what the main character spends most of the time doing or thinking about. Often the character is attempting to solve a conflict. The conflict is sometimes internal. For example, the character might be struggling to contain his anger or dangerous impulses. Other times the conflict is external – the character against his environment or another character. The character could be stuck in a storm or trying to win someone's affection. The main idea can also include a message or a moral. In two or three sentences, state the main action, the conflict, and the moral, if it is obvious.

Supporting Details

The supporting details are the feelings and actions that support the main idea. They include the ways that the main character attempts to resolve the conflict. The supporting details answer the questions of why and how. Consider the motivation of the protagonist and antagonist and how they are feeling or reacting to the chapter's events. Include broad details or concepts, but be selective and focus on the most significant ones. Write the details as the author presented them chronologically. Two or three more sentences are sufficient.

Revise for Clarity

Review your summary and revise it as needed. All the essential elements – characters, setting, theme, and significant details -- should be clearly and logically presented without distracting nonessentials or opinions. The

summary should be in your own words, not the author's. If you use an especially colorful sentence from the chapter, attribute it to the author to avoid plagiarism. Verify that your summary includes the title and author of the book as well as the chapter reference.