

Summarizing an Essay

Summarizing an essay is very much like summarizing a paragraph. The difference, of course, is that an essay is longer so your summary will be longer. When summarizing an essay, however, you are still finding down the major ideas. To find the major ideas, it is helpful to understand the organization of an essay.

Generally, an essay has three parts:

Introduction. An introduction states the subject of an essay and prepares the reader for a discussion of that subject. Most often, this subject is stated in a thesis statement. A thesis statement is the controlling idea of the entire essay.

Body. The body is made up of paragraphs that back up the thesis statement. These paragraphs usually contain facts and examples that help the reader understand the thesis more clearly. Usually these paragraphs begin with a topic sentence that contains the main ideas of the whole paragraph. These main ideas relate to the thesis statement and help make the thesis statement clearer.

Conclusion. A conclusion is one or two paragraphs at the end of the essay. The conclusion helps show the reader the significance of the discussion of the essay.

Here are four steps to follow when summarizing an essay:

1. Preview and read. Preview and read the essay closely. You will find that you need to read the essay more than one time, perhaps even four or five times.
2. Make a list or outline. Determine the thesis and main ideas that support the thesis. Make a list or outline of these ideas. Be sure to use your own words.
3. Write a summary. Using your list, write a summary of the essay. Limit your summary to one paragraph. (As a general rule, a summary should not be longer than $\frac{1}{4}$ the length of the essay.) Here are some additional guidelines to follow when writing the summary:
 - a. In the first sentence of your summary, state the title, author, and thesis of the essay. The thesis can be stated in the second sentence rather than the first sentence if you wish.

- b. In the rest of the summary, state the main ideas that back up the thesis. Also include any information that is needed to explain the main idea. State these ideas in the same order as they are given in the essay.
- c. A summary must be written in your own words. If you do not use the author's exact words in any part of the summary, you must put those words in quotation marks.