

Chapter 16

Summary

When you summarize, you use your own words to briefly report on or explain the ideas from a source such as a book or an essay. You reproduce the contents of a source in a condensed form, focusing on the author's main ideas and reporting them accurately and objectively. You report on the author's ideas but do not evaluate or judge them, so your opinions or ideas shouldn't be included. You must use your own words to express the ideas in the source. If you wish to use the author's words, you must use quotation marks around any words, phrases, and sentences that are the author's.

Examples of Summary

Peer Example Summary Paragraph



Alicia

“ Summarizing an article full of technical information is difficult because you have to understand the article thoroughly in order to condense it. ”

Bernstein’s “Class Society”

In “Is America Becoming More of a Class Society?” Aaron Bernstein argues that the U.S. economy is becoming more stratified based on a worker’s educational level. America has traditionally been a land of opportunity in which steady upward mobility was available to everyone. In the period up until the 1980s, all workers, regardless of education or class, made similar economic gains. However, new economic data shows that in the 80s, the American economy began to stratify, with mobility decreasing for workers with low skills and mobility increasing for educated workers. The same patterns of inequality continued into the early 1990s. Today, the salaries of workers with low skills are losing ground to inflation while the salaries of workers with college degrees are increasing. The mobility for low-income groups in the United States is now as low as, if not lower than, that of similar groups in many European countries. Many working families in this country are being forced to rely on food aid to make ends meet. The outlook for the 90s is no different, and the author concludes that the continued division between the classes threatens our democratic identity.

Peer Example Summary Essay

Alicia

Bernstein’s “Class Society”

America has traditionally been a land of opportunity in which steady upward mobility was available to everyone. Workers who started at the bottom and worked hard could rise through the ranks to the top of a company. As long as such opportunities were available, Americans have been willing to tolerate wide gaps between rich and poor. However, new economic studies show that mobility is decreasing for the poor while increasing for the affluent and well educated. The American dream of working hard and moving up is no longer a reality for many Americans who find themselves trapped in a series of menial jobs with low pay and no chance for advancement. In “Is America Becoming More of a Class Society?,” Aaron Bernstein argues that the U.S. economy is becoming more stratified based on a worker’s educational level.

In the period up until the 1980s, the majority of workers, regardless of education or class, made similar economic gains. In the period from 1947 to 1973, the incomes of poor families rose faster than the incomes of rich families, and most economists agree that mobility was significantly greater in the 50s and 60s than it is today. Even as recently as the 70s, however, workers

made similar gains regardless of educational level. For example, the ten-year earnings of high school dropouts increased 45 percent, while the earnings of high school graduates increased 42 percent, and the earnings of college graduates increased 53 percent. However, even in the 70s, a growing disparity between the incomes of very poor and the very rich was evident. While the pay of men in the bottom fifth fell behind inflation by 11 percent, the pay of men in the top fifth gained 29 percent. The same trend was evident in the incomes of poor families, which gained only 16 percent, compared to 60 percent for rich families. In spite of this disparity between the top and bottom, the majority of families, 61 percent, were considered middle class.

In the 1980s, the American economy began to stratify, with mobility decreasing for workers with low skills and mobility increasing for educated workers. The earnings of less educated workers dropped behind that of college graduates, with the incomes of high school dropouts gaining only 14 percent, the incomes of high school grads gaining 20 percent, and the incomes of college grads gaining 55 percent. In addition, the disparity between rich and poor that became apparent in the 70s escalated during the 80s. The wages of workers on the bottom lost 34 percent to inflation while the wages of men on the top increased 56 percent over the ten-year period.

The same patterns of inequality continue into the early 1990s. Although most workers lost ground in the early 1990s, the wages of those at the top fell less than those at the bottom, continuing to widen the gap between the rich and poor. For example, wages for men in the top fifth fell by only 1 percent, and that of men with college degrees lost only 0.4 percent, whereas the wages of high school grads fell by 4 percent, and wages of high school dropouts fell by 11 percent. Perhaps most startling, the middle class had shrunk to 50 percent by 1992, and more than one-fourth of the workforce has fallen below the poverty line. This figure doesn't include the 5 to 10 percent of the population that is permanently unemployed. As opportunities for workers at the bottom have decreased, the poor have begun to take on the characteristics of a permanent lower class. The need for emergency food aid has increased dramatically, and American workers at the bottom have less mobility than workers in many European countries.

The outlook for the future is no different, and the author concludes that the continued division between the classes threatens our democratic identity. Our democracy has been based on a stable middle class and on the ideal of economic and social mobility for all. If the gap between rich and poor continues to widen, our democratic identity may suffer.

Organization of Summary

The organization of a summary is based on the organization of the source. A summary presents the main points of the source in the same order they appear in the source.

Thesis Statements for Summary

The thesis restates the main idea or thesis of the source.

In “A Case for Poetry,” Marjorie Abrams argues that children should study poetry in grade school.	This thesis announces the thesis of the article that is being summarized.
In the March 1, 2006, <i>Weekly Gazette</i> , Mark Cuffy argues that increasing funding for education will provide long-term solutions to the crime problem.	This thesis contains the author, title, and source of the article as well as a restatement of the author’s thesis.
In his essay “The Black and White Truth About Basketball,” Jeff Greenfield argues that “black” and “white” styles of play are an outgrowth of different economic and social conditions.	The writer states the thesis of the essay he will summarize.

Transitions

Transitions that show addition and sequence are often used in summary.

Addition

also	in addition
as a matter of fact	in fact
besides	likewise
for instance	moreover
furthermore	similarly

Sequence

afterward	in the end
at last	meanwhile
at the same time	next
at this point	soon after
by this time	subsequently
eventually	then
finally	to begin with
first, second, third, etc.	

Tips on Planning a Summary

Writing a summary involves two things: thoroughly understanding the content of the source and reporting it accurately and objectively.

1. Look up unfamiliar vocabulary and make sure you understand the meaning of each word in context. Also make sure you understand any charts, graphs, or illustrations the author uses.
2. Take notes on and/or outline the source. Depending on the length of the original, it may be useful to state the main point of each paragraph in a sentence.
3. Determine the author's thesis and the main points used to support it.
4. Write your summary, reproducing the author's ideas in the order they were presented.
5. Check your summary for accuracy, balance, and coherence.

1. **Avoid mistaking details for main ideas.** Most examples, quotes, and statistics are support for main ideas. Although they may be interesting and memorable, don't confuse them with main ideas.

Example

Original: "In the past, companies could hire unskilled people and train them into skilled jobs," says Henry B. Schacht, the former CEO of Cummins Engine Co. who now is chairman of AT&T's \$20 billion equipment unit. "My predecessor at Cummins moved from the shop floor and ended up as president." But because Cummins, like many companies, has cut many first-line managerial jobs, "today those stairs don't exist."

Not the main idea: Henry Schacht's predecessor started on the shop floor and eventually became the president.

Main idea: Because many companies have cut managerial positions, employees no longer have the ability to rise through the ranks.

2. **Avoid including your opinion.** Remember that a summary condenses but does not evaluate the author's ideas.

Example

Opinion: Stogan seems way off base in concluding that absenteeism is due to worker burnout. A summary shouldn't make judgments about the source. It should report objectively on the content.

Summary: Stogan concludes that absenteeism is caused by worker burnout. This is an improved thesis for a summary essay.





3. **Avoid using the wording of the source.** Remember to use your own words when you summarize. It's a good idea to take notes from the source and use your notes to write the summary.

Example

Original: "After all, the U.S., unlike more rigid economies in Europe, has always been dynamic enough to provide steady upward mobility for workers."

Unacceptable paraphrase: The U.S. has a dynamic economy that provides steady upward mobility for workers, unlike the more rigid economies in Europe.

This would be an unacceptable paraphrase because it uses the same sentence structure and much of the same phrasing as the original.

Acceptable paraphrase: In the United States, unlike in Europe, workers have always been able to advance.

This is an acceptable summary or paraphrase of the original writing.

Writing Assignment

Select one of the topics below to develop as a paragraph or an essay.

1. Choose an essay or chapter from one of your textbooks and write a summary that explains the main points covered.
2. Pick up a local newspaper, choose a news story, article, or editorial, and summarize its contents.
3. Choose a movie or a TV show you know well and summarize the storyline. Remember that a summary is objective, so don't include your opinion of the show.
4. Use your class notes to summarize a class or lecture you attended.
5. Do you use the Internet to get information? Choose an Internet article or Web site that you know well and summarize the contents.

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