Summarizing

A summary-

- is an essential condensation in your own words.
- answers the question "what is the author really saying?"
- is the result of careful "listening" to the author.
- remains faithful to the author's emphasis and interpretation.
- does not disagree with or critique the author's opinions.

How to Summarize a Paragraph

- Read the paragraph twice.
- Isolate the topic sentence; if it conveys reliably the meaning of the paragraph, consider it your summary.
- Underline key phrases and look for any crucial distinctions or contrasts which form the framework of the paragraph (the difference in attitudes about women in the workforce before World War II versus after WWII, for example).
- Write your own summarizing sentence which makes use of those key phrases or distinctions.

How to Summarize an Article

- Ask yourself why the article was written and who is the intended audience.
- Consider the author's background. Does he have a special bias or point of view?
- Compare the opening and closing paragraphs.
- Read the entire article more than once, if necessary.
- Underline key or repeated words and phrases.
- Distinguish the author's main idea from details which support that idea or are repetitions and variations on the same theme.
- Draft a several-sentence summary which defines the author's main idea broadly enough to account for most of the supporting material introduced.

How to Summarize a Complex Article

- Preview the article, skimming headings and first sentences; clarify any difficult terms with a dictionary or glossary.
- Read the opening and closing paragraphs.
- Read the article at least twice.
- Isolate each important point as it occurs in the essay and write it down in a complete sentence.
- State the thesis of the article in one sentence.
- Note how ideas are related to each other-comparison/contrast, cause-effect relationships, problem-solution patterns.
- Write your summary by reconstructing the author's argument from your list of important ideas; draw attention to the relationships among ideas by using transitional phrases (like nevertheless, however, in contrast).

Remember, your summary should-

- read like a coherent, unified paragraph in its own right.
- account for most of what the author says in your own words.
- maintain a neutral, impartial tone.

From: Spatt, Writing from Sources