

WRITING A SUMMARY

Good summarizing skills are essential for success in writing, and are crucial in preparing to write research papers and essays. You need these skills because summarizing is efficient and it helps you distinguish between more and less important material.

Summary is a shortened version of someone else's writing or thoughts. Summaries vary in length and amount of details depending on a teacher's requirements, the length of the original source (article, book, passage) and the purpose of the summary; however, **all summaries must:**

- be **shorter** than the original source (article, book, passage) approximately one third the length of the original source;
- include the **main idea** of the original source in your own words;
- include major details (also known as supporting ideas) in your own words;
- **should not include your knowledge, ideas or opinion** unless your teacher requests it;
- identify the author, title of article, title of publication, where published, publisher, year of publication, and page information, at the top of the page of your summary (or in-text);
- use phrases like: "**according to the author**", "**the author says**", "**the author points out**", "**the article/the author shows/emphasizes/suggests/considers that ...**", "**this article presents/examines**".

*Look at the **example summary** to see how many ways this student refers to O'Neill and describes O'Neill's writing.*

Author Jaime O'Neill's article, "No Allusions in the Classroom," emphasizes the communication problem between teachers and students due to the students' lack of basic knowledge. The author supports this assertion by using a combination of personal experience, evidence obtained from recent polls, other professors' opinions, and the results of an experiment he conducted in his own classroom. The experiment O'Neill conducted was an ungraded eighty-six question "general knowledge" test issued to students on the first day of classes. On this test, "most students answered incorrectly far more often than they answered correctly." Incorrect answers included fallacies such as: "Darwin invented gravity" and "Leningrad was in Jamaica." Compounding the problem, students don't ask questions. This means that their teachers assume they know things that they do not. O'Neill shows the scope of this problem by showing that, according to their teachers, this seems to be a typical problem across the United States. O'Neill feels that common knowledge in a society is essential to communicate. Without this common knowledge, learning is made much more difficult because teacher and student do not have a common body of knowledge from which to draw. The author shows the deterioration of common knowledge through poll results, personal experience, other teachers' opinions, and his own experiment's results.

Jaime O'Neill, No Allusions in the Classroom, *Newsweek*, September 23, 1985.