

Tips on Writing a Summary and Response Essay

The summary and response essay is a critical response to a text that focuses you on the main ideas about a given topic and your reactions to those ideas. It is not a review or comment on whether or not you liked something. The focus is primarily on your response to the ideas presented about the subject matter being addressed.

Tips on Writing your Summary

The summary is a very brief description of what the piece you are responding to is about. It is meant to be neutral and objective. Most of the time, unless summarizing a very large work or otherwise instructed, a summary should be no more than a paragraph or two. The purpose of the summary is to introduce the title of the work and author and cover the main ideas of the piece. Below are tips to keep in mind as you are writing your summary.

- Include the title and author's full name.
- Explain the main ideas being presented.
- Do not go into specific details unless they relate to your response.
- Minimize the use of quotes.
- Write in the present tense.
- Use strong verbs like "claims," "supports," "analyzes," and "discusses" instead of "says"
- Be objective and do not include your opinion.
- Be concise and avoid wordiness.
- Make your summary clear so that someone who has not read the original material can still understand.

Tips on Writing your Response

When writing a response, keep the emphasis on your viewpoint and position. This is meant to be more subjective. You may agree, disagree, or both agree and disagree with the author. No matter which way you go, add something new to the conversation. Your response may cover the whole text, or it may focus only on a small part of it, especially if it is very lengthy. Below are some suggestions for possible ways of responding:

- reflection – examining the ways in which the text affected your thinking on the topic
- conversation – demonstrating how your experiences build on, contradict, or alter the author's ideas
- extension – pushing the ideas of the text further and seeing how those ideas might apply to different situations
- tempering the position – raising concerns about the overlooked aspects of the text's ideas
- rhetorical analysis – examine how the author uses language to communicate ideas
- strength of argument – questioning how the text supports its ideas

Note that you are not expected to do all of these things in one response; pick and choose appropriately.