

Writing Effective Summary and Response Essays

The Summary:

A summary is a concise paraphrase of all the main ideas in an essay. It cites the author and the title (usually in the first sentence); it contains the essay's thesis and supporting ideas; it may use direct quotation of forceful or concise statements of the author's ideas; it will NOT usually cite the author's examples or supporting details unless they are central to the main idea. Most summaries present the major points in the order that the author made them and continually refer back to the article being summarized (i.e. "Damon argues that ..." or "Goodman also points out that ... "). The summary should take up no more than one-third the length of the work being summarized.

The Response:

A response is a critique or evaluation of the author's essay. Unlike the summary, it is composed of YOUR opinions in relation to the article being summarized. It examines ideas that you agree or disagree with and identifies the essay's strengths and weaknesses in reasoning and logic, in quality of supporting examples, and in organization and style. A good response is persuasive; therefore, it should cite facts, examples, and personal experience that either refutes or supports the article you're responding to, depending on your stance.

Two Typical Organizational Formats for Summary/Response Essays:

1. Present the summary in a block of paragraphs, followed by the response in a block:

Intro/thesis
Summary (two to three paragraphs)
Agreement (or disagreement)
Disagreement (or agreement)
Conclusion

Note: Some essays will incorporate both agreement and disagreement in a response, but this is not mandatory.

2. Introduce the essay with a short paragraph that includes your thesis. Then, each body paragraph summarizes one point and responds to it, and a conclusion wraps the essay up.

Intro/thesis
Summary point one; agree/disagree
Summary point two; agree/disagree
Summary point three; agree/disagree
Conclusion