4

SUMMARIZING: THE AUTHOR'S MAIN IDEAS

Summary, like paraphrase, allows you to reproduce another writer's thoughts—but in shortened form. In writing a summary, you focus on the most important statements of the original statements of the original passage and eliminate the less important material. Three techniques—*selection and deletion*, *note taking*, and *miniaturizing*—can help you shorten the material. As you become more adept at summarizing, you will devise your own combination of these techniques for each occasion. But in all cases the summary must be written in readable prose that reflects the essential meaning of the original text. Like paraphrase, summary can be used for many purposes: to help you understand the main points and structure of the author's argument, to convey understanding to others, to present background information quickly, or to refer to another writer's ideas in the course of making your own original statement.

Writing a Summary

Whereas paraphrase writing leads you to examine all the details and nuances of a text, summary writing gives you an overview of the text's whole meaning. If you look over the whole text too rapidly, however, you may overlook important parts. Good summary writing, therefore, requires careful attention to the meaning and shape of the entire text. As you become more skilled at summary writing, you will become aware of just how much meaning can be distorted or lost by too rushed a summary. You will also become aware how much meaning you can convey in just a few words if you write precisely.

Unlike the paraphrase writer, who must discover new ways to restate the meaning, the summarizer looks for the most compact restatement. To highlight the essentials of another writer's idea—rather than to provide a complete and detailed restatement—is the purpose of summary writing. A summary will help you understand the major direction, the main points, and the overall shape of the more detailed original. It restates the essence of the original in as few words as possible, but not necessarily in different words. In most cases, when you use an author's original words, you need to put them in quotation marks, as discussed in Chapter 11. Only when you are writing a freestanding summary for which the source is given and which is labeled as a summary of that source do you not have to use quotation marks. *In all other cases,* when you use a summary in the course of your own writing, you must use your own words or mark the use of the author's words with quotation marks. If in your writing you do not identify the source of the words, ideas, or information used in the summary, you are committing plagiarism (see Chapter 11).

To rewrite a longer piece in short form, you must first understand the piece you are working with. Begin by reading the piece carefully, making sure you absorb the full meaning. If there are words you do not know, look them up. If some sentences are confusing, paraphrase them. Identify the main ideas and determine how the less important material relates to those main ideas. In short, read.

Once you understand the piece you are summarizing, you must decide which parts you are going to include in the summary and which you are going to leave out. Of course, how much material you select depends on how long you want the summary to be and for what purpose you are going to use the summary. (We will discuss these issues in the latter part of this chapter.) However, unless you have a more specific ratio in mind, you should generally try to create a summary about one-fifth to one-quarter the length of the original.

This chapter presents three methods for choosing the material to include in a summary: selection and deletion, note taking, and miniaturizing. The methods overlap somewhat. By deleting, for example, you in effect select the material that remains. Miniaturizing is only a structurally focused version of note taking. A good summary takes into account all three methods, and in practice people switch back and forth among them. Because each of these methods emphasizes slightly different skills, however, we will discuss them separately. Through the somewhat artificial separation and isolated practice of these skills, you will master the art of making concise and exact summaries. After you gain control of all the methods, you will be able to combine them as you see fit. Before we discuss these methods, however, let us briefly examine the steps in writing a summary.

Informative and Descriptive Summaries

Having selected the material to include in your summary, you must then decide whether your summary will be informative or descriptive. *Informative summaries* adopt the tone of the original

full text, simply presenting the information it contains in shorter form. *Descriptive summaries* adopt a more distant perspective, describing the original text rather than directly presenting the information it contains. An informative summary of the Declaration of Independence might begin as follows:

> When people declare themselves independent of their political ties, they should give reasons. Governments are formed to protect equality and rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. If government does not do this, people can change the government.

A descriptive summary of the same passage might begin as follows:

> Jefferson opens the Declaration of Independence by stating that a country declaring independence needs to give its reasons. He goes on to discuss the purposes of government in protecting individual rights and the legitimacy of change if government does not live up to its obligations.

Note that the informative summary does not mention the author or title of the piece but rather gets right down to the content. Thus it can present more information more compactly and more precisely. To convey the content of a source, informative summaries are preferable to descriptive summaries. (Most of the summaries in this chapter are informative.) In addition, when research material is simply reported for its factual content, as in the synthesis paper on page 261, the informative summary is used.

On the other hand, descriptive summaries give a more nearly complete picture of the structure of the original. They also establish a certain distance between the writer of the summary and the writer of the original piece. This sense of objectivity is useful whenever the summarized material is to be analyzed, evaluated, or otherwise discussed. For critical or evaluative purposes, descriptive summaries are preferable. Hence descriptive summaries should be used in book reviews (see Chapter 8), in essays of analysis (see, for example, page 125), and in other essays discussing a text (see, for example, page 100).

The Summary as Writing

The key to writing an effective summary is combining the material you choose to include into concise, coherent sentences and paragraphs. If your sentences are carelessly formed, not only will the summary be unreadable, you will also lose the connection among the pieces of information in the summary. You could simply wind up with tossed word salad. On the other hand, carefully written sentences can help show how the separate facts and ideas fit together to build the meaning of the whole. Thoughtful word choice and sentence structure can help you reduce a summary by half with no loss of information, ideas, or clarity. Incidentally, because the summary form places such a premium on conciseness and clarity, writing summaries provides excellent practice for the improvement of your general writing style.

Because you are taking information from many parts of the original text, you could easily lose sight of the logical structure of the whole piece. You need to pay close attention to the new transitions and paragraph structure of the summary. Rather than running all the information together in a series of seemingly unrelated sentences, you can use transitions to show the connection between sentences, and you can create new paragraphs to reflect large divisions in the original material.

Finally, in your finished draft of the summary, be sure you identify the source of the original material in a heading, an introductory phrase, or a footnote. When summaries stand by

themselves, the source usually appears in the heading. When summaries are worked into the course of longer arguments, you can cite the source of your material in an introductory phrase or a footnote without interrupting the flow of your argument.

Steps in Writing a Summary

1. Read the original carefully.
2. Choose material for the summary.
3. Decide whether your summary will be informative or descriptive.
4. Rewrite the material in concise, coherent sentences and paragraphs.
5. Identify the source of the text.

Methods of Choosing Material for the Summary

Method 1: Selection and Deletion

Because a summary moves quickly through the main points of the original, you need to focus on the most important ideas and details and leave out less important material. In preparing to write your summary, you can identify important material by underlining, circling, or highlighting it and can eliminate less important material by deleting it—crossing it out.

Look for key words to identify: those that express substantial information or make major statements. Ask yourself, "What is central here? What is the author's specific point? What statements draw the whole piece together?" Cross out digressions, repetitions, nonessential background information, extended examples, interest-provoking anecdotes, and other minor supporting details. Thus by selection and deletion, you make the most important material emerge, while you push the less important to the background. This method of choosing material works best where there are direct statements of main ideas, accompanied by much detailed elaboration, wordy examples, digressions, or other clearly less important material.

A STUDENT EXAMPLE FOR DISCUSSION

The following passage is taken from an article by Katherine Corcoran in the *Washington Journalism Review.* Corcoran, a San Francisco-based reporter, evaluates how well the press—especially the women of the press—reported on Hillary Rodham Clinton during the 1992 presidential campaign. The passage is given first in its original form, then with its secondary and superfluous material crossed out and key words circled. Finally, one possible informative summary is presented. In order to involve yourself in the student example and the discussion that follows, read through the original passage, decide what material you would select for a summary or delete, and write your own informative summary of the passage from Corcoran's article. Then compare your results with the example.

[COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL REMOVED]

Here is the same passage with key phrases circled and superfluous passages crossed out:

[COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL REMOVED]

Sample Summary

"Pilloried Clinton," by Katherine Corcoran

Although Hillary (Rodham) Clinton is the first wife of a presidential candidate to have a career of her own, media coverage of the 1992 presidential campaign focused more on her devotion to husband and family, her appearance, and her personality than on her career. While some stories raised serious questions about her influence over the presidential candidate and about the possibility of an official role in a Clinton administration, many others were full of loaded language that conjured up negative images. While some stories addressed Hillary Clinton's views, others, many written by women presumably as career-oriented as their subject, addressed Hillary Clinton's changing public image. Either these reporters didn't know how to write about this "new woman" in line to become first lady or it is simply the nature of the press to oversimplify.

After her first appearance in January, responding to allegations of her husband's infidelity on "60 Minutes," the press took a traditional approach to covering Hillary Clinton because that is how she appeared. Even though Hillary's "Tammy Wynette slur" was labeled a "gaffe" by the press, early coverage was straightforward and serious compared to later stories.

COMMENTS ON THE SUMMARY

In the opening paragraphs of the article, Corcoran contrasts two types of coverage: serious reports on Hillary Clinton's career, views, and potential role as first lady and sensational reports on her superficial public image. In this section examples and details are deleted and key terms are circled in order to play up the general contrast between the two types of coverage. The first paragraph is deleted because it is not essential to the author's main argument. The middle paragraphs of the passage offer two possible explanations for the press treatment of Hillary Clinton. A key phrase and a key word representing these two explanations-*didn't know how* and *oversimplify*-are circled.

The rest of the article details the history of the press coverage of Hillary Clinton during the campaign and gives specific examples of the progression from serious to sensational accounts. In the passage cited here, press coverage during the early stages of the campaign is described. The paragraph on the 1988 campaign is deleted because it serves only as background. The main ideas in the paragraphs detailing press coverage in the early stages of the campaign appear in key words and phrases in topic sentences or in concluding phrases and are circled.

Rewriting material from the key words and phrases involves combining several sentences (or even several paragraphs) into a single sentence in order to present main ideas more concisely and show connections between them. For example, the second and third sentences of the summary combine and categorize the examples in paragraphs three through five of the passage in order to emphasize the contrast between two types of press coverage. The last sentence in the first paragraph of the summary brings together the key terms from paragraphs six through eight of the passage in order to condense and clarify why women of the press covered Hillary Clinton the way they did. The two sentences in the second paragraph of the summary combine the key points of the final paragraphs of the passage and give a skeletal history of press coverage at the beginning of the campaign; details illustrating the general nature of this coverage are given but not elaborated on. In each of the summary sentences, much of the original wording is used; but in some places, rephrasing has made the new sentences shorter and more to the point.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Using the method of selection and deletion, summarize the continuation of Katherine Corcoran's article on the media's handling of Hillary Clinton.

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Method 2: Note Taking

Taking notes on the key ideas for each of the sections of the original reveals the logic of ideas in the whole piece and the connections among them. As you write down the key idea for each paragraph or so of the original, you will be concerned more with large chunks of meaning than with specific details. As you look over your notes, you may notice that each paragraph has its own meaning, which is related to the meaning of the paragraph before or after it. You will become aware of the whole piece as a series of ideas, one following another.

A STUDENT EXAMPLE FOR DISCUSSION

This method may be useful when summarizing a piece that clearly develops an idea in each paragraph but seems to change from paragraph to paragraph, as a more complex idea builds from each of the parts or a large idea breaks into many subsections. The notes then become an outline of the flow of the author's thought. Before reading the sample and comments, work through the following passage on your own. The passage is an excerpt from Daniel Boorstin's *The Image* that discusses "pseudo-events" or what are now called "media events."

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Notes on the Passage

Pseudo-events, or false events, are flooding our experience.

Example: Hotel wants to increase prestige and business. Instead of improving facilities, it stages anniversary celebration, with prominent people and press coverage.

Event itself makes it appear that the hotel is distinguished. Report of event in news media makes an impression on potential customers. Making event makes experience.

But event is not quite real.

Characteristics of pseudo-events:
1. Planned, planted, or incited
2. Scheduled for media convenience
3. Ambiguous relationship to reality
4. Self-fulfilling prophecy

Sample Summary

"News-Making: The Pseudo-Event,"
by Daniel Boorstin

> The hotel that, in order to boost its prestige and business, stages an anniversary celebration instead of improving its facilities exemplifies the pseudo-event, or false event, which now floods our experience. The news reports of the event, involving prominent citizens, make the hotel appear distinguished and impresses potential customers. Making the event makes an experience, but the event is not quite real Pseudo-events like this one have four characteristics: they are planned, planted, or incited; they are scheduled for media convenience; their relationship to reality is ambiguous; and they are self-fulfilling prophecies.

COMMENTS ON THE SUMMARY

This excerpt develops a definition of the pseudo-event through the discussion of one main example. By developing a set of notes, I discovered how the more general opening and closing paragraphs led into and out of the specific case. In the first sentence of the summary, I was able to show that connection by directly tying the example to the general topic. In the last sentence I was again able to clarify the link to the example with the phrase *like this one.*

The excerpt itself proceeds from a direct description to an analysis to more general conclusions. Again the notes help trace the flow of thought, which I can then recapture in the written summary. Some important details, first described and then analyzed (such as the news reporting and the participation of prominent people), could be combined with the analysis. The contrast of ideas in the next to last sentence of the summary reflects the two levels of analysis in the fourth and fifth paragraphs of the original. Note also that the summary, like the outline, preserves the list structure for presenting the four characteristics of pseudo-events.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Using the method of note taking, summarize the next section of Boorstin's discussion of pseudo-events. It probes the historical causes of the rise of these media fictions.

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Method 3: Miniaturizing

As you read through the original, pay attention to the various parts of the structure: the order of ideas, their relative lengths, and their relationships. Think of a large photograph reduced to wallet size. In a relative sense all the parts remain the same; only the scale has changed. Notice the shape, flow, and overall impression of the original passage so you can create a miniature version of it in your summary. As in the note-taking method, you should jot down the main ideas and key statements of the original, but you should also try to keep the size of your notes in rough proportion to the size of the original. Follow the logic of one idea flowing from another, and re-create the transitions and structure of the original.

When the arrangement, logical development, and balance of parts of the original are important, miniaturizing will help you retain the overall meaning and impression. Generally this method is most appropriate for more complex and subtly argued originals, whose parts fit together in unusual ways or in ways that are difficult to follow.

A STUDENT EXAMPLE FOR DISCUSSION

Attempt your own summary of the following discussion by Howard Wolinsky and Tom Brune of a controversial article about a mercy killing before reading the sample notes, summary, and

comments. The article about mercy killing originally appeared in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and is reproduced in this book on page 74; the following discussion appeared in *The Quill,* a magazine for journalists.

JAMA's Jam

It all started when someone sent an unsolicited essay to the *Journal of the American Medical Association* last year. It could have happened to any publication. Newspapers, magazines and scientific and medical journals get manuscripts they haven't commissioned all the time. The difference in this case was the subject matter of the essay. The essay—500 words or so—was a first-person account of how a groggy gynecology resident in an unnamed hospital was awakened at 3 a.m. to ease the pain of a suffering, sleepless 20-year-old ovarian cancer patient. The resident ended her pain by giving her what he believed to be a fatal injection of morphine. The essay ... was a description of a mercy killing, and, in effect, a confession to a murder. And it had been submitted to JAMA for publication on one condition-that the author's name be withheld. Editors have many choices when they get a piece like this. Dr. George Lundberg, a physician and the editor of JAMA for the past six years, chose a course that landed the AMA in court-and reaped angry denunciations from physicians, ethicists and many journalists and the editors of other medical journals.

Lundberg plunked the piece into the essay section of the January 8 edition of JAMA without listing the author's name, without verifying that the event actually took place, and without running a preface explaining *why* he was publishing the essay or that he was uncertain about the essay's veracity.

Lundberg later explained that he wanted to stir up a debate over a controversial subject. That he did. But he also stirred up a discussion about his own 'actions, raising questions of medical and journalistic ethics for which there are no ready answers. And, through his actions and statements, he illustrated that editors of medical and scientific journals operate in a culture that is largely foreign to the world of journalists who gather news for a general audience.

The 105-year-old *Journal of the American Medical Association,* published in Chicago, claims to be the most widely circulated medical publication in the world, with 383,000 readers of the English language edition and 250,000 readers of its 10 foreign-language editions. Published by the most powerful doctors' organization in the country, JAMA also is one of two top medical publications in the United States. The popular press looks to JAMA and the *New England 10urnal of Medicine* each week for the latest medical news.

JAMA's January 8 edition was no exception. Graced with a portrait of a woman by the 19th-century painter Ingres on its cover, JAMA included two items many newspapers picked up: a study of a syndrome in which people's blood pressure shoots up at the sight of a doctor's white coat, and an article and editorial saying tighter controls and better counseling need to accompany Human Immunodeficiency Virus antibody testing, commonly known as AIDS testing. The issue also included "It's Over, Debbie."

"Debbie" appeared in a section called "A Piece of My Mind," which Lundberg portrays as "an informal courtyard of creativity," a place where poems, anecdotes and unscientific matters are published.

Lundberg refuses to reveal many specifics of the editorial process, and he forbids interviews with his staff. But he does note that JAMA articles are put through a peer-review process. Lundberg, however, won't disclose the number, names or occupations of the reviewers who looked at the Debbie piece, or the contents of their reviews. Nor will he talk about the number of JAMA staffers who opposed publishing the piece.

He also declines to say whether he asked lawyers for the AMA to review the piece. However, Kirk Johnson, the AMA's general counsel, said Lundberg didn't discuss the essay with him prior to publication.

Lundberg also refuses to say whether he consulted with medical ethicists in advance of publication, though AMA attorney Johnson said the essay had been reviewed by an ethicist.

Notes on the Passage

1. INTRODUCTION—sets up the situation and describes the controversial article.
2. THE CHOICE—The editor's choice landed the AMA in court and caused angry denunciations from physicians, ethicists, journalists, and medical editors. The choice was to publish without author's name, verification, or explanation in order to stir up debate.
3. PLACEMENT IN JAMA—old, respected, most widely circulated medical journal, containing technical information that journalists watch for news. "It's Over, Debbie" appeared in an informal opinion section. The editor will not discuss any details about how the article was reviewed or edited.

Sample Summary

"JAMA's Jam," by Howard Wolinsky and Tom Brune

When an unsolicited essay about how a doctor assisted in the mercy killing of a cancer patient was submitted to the *Journal of the American Medical Association,* the editor decided to publish the article. He published it without identifying the author, without verifying the facts, and without explaining his reasons for publication. That decision landed the AMA in court and brought down angry denunciations from physicians, ethicists, journalists, and editors. The editor wanted to stir up debate on the controversial issue of mercy killing, but he also stirred up debate about the ethics of publication.

JAMA is 105 years old, claims to be the most widely circulated medical publication in the world, and is one of the press's sources of medical news. "It's Over. Debbie" appeared in a special section of the journal devoted to informal responses and thoughts. The editor refused to say how the article was reviewed or edited.

COMMENTS ON THE SUMMARY

The original selection has three sections: a description of the situation created by the receipt of the article, a discussion of the editor's choice and the choice's consequences, and a description of the article's appearance in the journal. Since the situation created by the article and the choice made in that situation are closely linked, I was able to describe both in one opening sentence. I then elaborated the choice and its consequences in the rest of the opening paragraph, and I described the appearance of the article in the journal in a separate paragraph. I kept to the original order throughout, except that I stated the editor's decision right away ("... the editor decided to publish the article") to decrease suspense. This change led to a clearer presentation of the event and its consequences.

Because ideas in the original are frequently developed over several paragraphs, the notes and summary sentences combine widely separated bits of material and often develop new wording to achieve these combinations.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Use the method of miniaturizing to summarize further excerpts from the article on the ethics of the JAMA decision. These excerpts present some of the criticisms of the editor and his defense.

JAMA's Jam
(continued)

The *New York Post* on January 27 was the first major newspaper to write about the essay. The *Post* reported that New York mayor Ed Koch, alerted by a doctor friend, had sent a letter to U.S. Attorney General Ed Meese. Koch told Meese that the act described in the

essay was "what I can only conclude is a murder ...." "I urge you to look into this matter," he said, "and inappropriate, pursue criminal charges against this doctor." Meese did nothing, and all was quiet until January 31, when the *Chicago Tribune* ran a page-one article by science writer Jon Van describing the essay and reporting views of doctors and medical ethicists. Van said he heard about the Debbie case from an angry doctor on January 22. "The doctor was really pissed off," he recalled. Van had contacted prominent medical ethicists to get reactions.

Two days after the *Tribune* piece, the office of Cook County State's Attorney Richard M. Daley, son of the late mayor, informally asked Kirk Johnson, the AMA's attorney, for the author's name.

Daley actually had been made aware of "Debbie" on January 14 by Americans United for Life, a pro-life law firm based in Chicago. But it may have taken the high visibility of the *Tribune* piece to spark action by the prosecutor, whose jurisdiction includes the AMA's Chicago headquarters.

"It [the Debbie essay] would have made a splash and died, if it were not for Daley's office pursuing it," Van said.

At a February 5 news conference, Johnson said the AMA would not voluntarily give the name to prosecutors, but *would* turn the writer in if ordered to do so by a judge.

The *Chicago Sun-Times* followed this up with a string of stories questioning the veracity of the essay as well as JAMA's handling of the case. On February 14, the *Sun-Times* broke the story that the Cook County grand jury had issued a subpoena to obtain the author's name

On February 16, the AMA announced that it had been served with a grand jury subpoena for essay documents. The AMA waffled a bit on just how far it would go to protect the author's identity. On February 22, the AMA filed a motion to quash the subpoena.

In its brief, the AMA argued that the prosecutor had failed to follow guidelines set down by the Illinois Reporters Privilege Act and that disclosure of the author's name would jeopardize confidential sources for all publications, which would be an inhibition of free and open discussion guaranteed by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The Illinois shield law requires those seeking privileged information to apply in writing to the court to set aside the protection. The act also holds that the court can set aside the protection only after determining that the person seeking the information had exhausted all other available sources and that the information was essential to the protection of the public interest involved. The AMA also argued that it was unclear as to whether the state's attorney had jurisdiction in the case. The actions described in the essay could have been done by any doctor at any hospital in any state or in any country, not necessarily in Cook County. Finally, the AMA argued that it did not know whether the actions described had actually happened. The Headline Club, the local chapter of The Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi, as well as the Media Institute, the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press and the Radio-Television News Directors Association filed *amicus* briefs in support of the AMA position. The state's attorney's office argued that a homicide had taken place, and that the First Amendment never was intended to protect the identity of a murderer. It argued that the AMA had a duty to turn over the name, Just as a citizen who had knowledge of a person who had committed a crime would. The court battle was short. After hearing arguments, Richard Fitzgerald, chief judge of the Cook County Criminal Court, dismissed the subpoena March 18. "At the present time," Fitzgerald ruled, "there is no indication a crime was committed, and the question of whether a crime was committed in Cook County is merely speculative." The judge also said that the state's attorney had failed to exhaust all other avenues for getting information about the matter and had not proved that obtaining the name was essential to the public interest.

Lundberg hailed the ruling. Not only did it vindicate his decision to print the essay, he said, but it set a precedent by confirming that medical and scientific journals enjoy the same press freedoms and protections that have been normally afforded broadcast news and newspapers.

"I never had any doubt from the day we published the essay that we did the right thing," Lundberg said afterward.

The decision also saved Lundberg from the need to make the painful decision as to whether he would turn in the author if a court ordered him to do so. He said he was unsure as to whether he would have gone to jail to protect the author's anonymity. He admitted

> that JAMA had agreed "as a condition of acceptance we would not publish the name of the author."
>
> But, Lundberg added, "We did not enter into a blood pledge to the author that we would go to jail if subpoenaed, because it didn't come up in the correspondence with the author. We recognized it as a remote possibility, but that was not discussed with the author."
>
> The possibility of perhaps going to jail has passed, at least for now. Daley has indicated that the matter may be dead legally. But controversy continues to swirl over the medical and journalistic ethics of Lundberg's handling of the essay, not to mention the moral and ethical problems raised by the essay itself.

Methods of Choosing Material for the Summary

1. *Select more important information and delete less important material.* This method may be useful when clearly stated mains ideas in the piece are immediately followed by many details or examples.
2. *Take notes on the main ideas.* This method may be useful when the development of a complex idea in the piece is treated in many subsections. The notes serve as an outline of the flow of the author's thought.
3. *Miniaturize the original.* This method may be useful when the logical development is subtly argued and parts of the piece fir together in unusual ways.

Summary Length

The sample summaries in this chapter are about one-quarter the length of the full versions; however, the relative length of any summary is not a fixed proportion. The compactness of the style of the original, the compactness of the summary writer's style, and the purpose of the summary all help determine how short the summary will be.

If the original is densely written (that is, much information is presented in few words), then making the summary too short may destroy the integrity of the ideas communicated. If the original contains subtle relationships, complex sentences, difficult concepts, and relatively few details and examples, it is very hard to eliminate many words and still maintain the sense of the original. On the other hand, if an author introduces only one idea to a page, repeats that idea in different ways, gives many similar examples, and relies on simple sentences that present only one or two bits of information, the summary can eliminate much without distortion or over simplification. The second factor, the tightness of the language in the summary, depends on your skill with sentences and words. In writing more concisely, however, be sure to keep the meaning and sentence structure clear. Abstract and conceptual language, in particular, may become confusing in densely written passages. Compactness in writing should therefore be practiced in moderation; it is important not to jeopardize ease of reading. A clear, simple statement is often most compact.

Length Depends on the Purpose of the Summary

How you will eventually use the summary determines what is important to include and what is unimportant. The relative distinction between major and minor pieces of information depends very much on the interests of those who you anticipate will read your summary.

If the purpose of the summary is to give only a general idea of what is in the original—so that the reader can decide whether or not to read the full version—the summary can be quite spare, even less than 1 percent of the original. Some professional journals are simply collections of short abstracts of work published in other specialized journals. Journals such as *Research in Education, Biological Abstracts,* and *Economic Abstracts* help keep professionals aware of new work in their fields. But to obtain substantive information, the researcher must turn to the original. A typical professional abstract might contain bibliographical information, the major thesis or findings, and a suggestion of the method or the argument, as in the following example from *Psychological Abstracts,* which discusses how electronic communications have created problems for copyright laws.

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The other extreme is the summary that is so detailed that the reader can get all necessary information without referring to the original. In government and business, higher-level officials who have too many responsibilities" and too little time may make important decisions on the basis of summaries of reports and background documents. Subordinates who sift through the volumes of original material" to prepare such summaries must select all the information that a manager might find useful in making the decision. The informative summary is, in fact, a set part of official reports so that readers can get to the essential findings without having to wade through all the evidence.

On the more popular level, such condensations of best sellers as those published by *Reader's Digest* provide readers who lack the patience to read full books a short version of the originals-although subtlety, style, characterization, and other literary qualities frequently suffer.

In the middle length are summaries created for various reference purposes. A book tracing the development of economic thought might devote a few pages to summarizing Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in order to introduce the reader to that economist's ideas. Books like *Masterplots,* which summarize the plots of famous plays and novels, serve to refresh readers' memories about books they read long ago as well as to help new readers through the more difficult original. The various kinds of study guides and pamphlets you may be familiar with also serve this last function. They are useful to help you through the original but cannot stand in place of the full work.

Knowing When to Summarize

The most frequent and most important use of summary is to refer to another writer's work in the course of a new and original essay. Summary has the advantage over paraphrase in that it allows the writer to pick out and focus on only those aspects of the original that are most relevant to the new points being made. The flexibility of wording in a summary also allows the writer to fit it in smoothly with his or her original, ongoing statements.

When you are incorporating a summary into your own statement, it is important to remember that you should summarize only as much of the original text as is necessary to advance your own argument; do not let the summary overwhelm the direction of your own writing. A fuller discussion of the relative merits and appropriateness of each form of reference-summary, paraphrase, quotation, and name—can be found in Chapter 11.

Many of the writing assignments that appear in this book rely on summary to introduce material for discussion. In the next chapter, for example, the first paragraph of the sample essay

comparing reading and experience presents a summary of two sociologists' discussion of upward mobility. The rest of the essay compares the ideas in that summary to the actual experiences of the student's family.

A STUDENT EXAMPLE FOR DISCUSSION

Following is the opening of a paper by student Jennifer Contreras for a course in women's studies. Jennifer uses Katherine Corcoran's article as a jumping-off point for a reflective essay on the staying power of traditional gender stereotypes. She summarizes Corcoran's article to advance a new argument on a different topic. In order to make her point, Jennifer focuses and shapes her summary to bring out the issues of most interest to her. Her opening paragraph lays out the general issues of the essay and, in its final sentence, states Jennifer's thesis—that Corcoran's article illustrates two problems in the press's reporting about women. In the second paragraph, Jennifer briefly summarizes the opening paragraphs of Corcoran's article, including a short quotation. Jennifer's summary is followed by the first of her two response points: the persistence of a double standard.

Sample Summary

"Pilloried Clinton," by Katherine Corcoran

Does "the old double standard" still exist or, as Virginia Slims claims, have we really "come a long way, baby"? Even the use of the sexist term, "baby," in these ads suggests that women still have quite a long way to go. Even after 1992, "the year of the woman," women are still under-represented in national, state, and local governments, and the only way a woman has ever gotten into the White House is by marrying into it. Katherine Corcoran's article on how the press, and in particular the women in the press, covered Hillary Clinton -a woman who was not a candidate for elected office—during the 1992 presidential campaign, illustrates two points: first, that women in positions of power are judged by different standards than are men, and second, that women as well as men are guilty of invoking this "double standard."

Corcoran begins her article with a series of rhetorical questions that, if there were true equality between the sexes, would not be rhetorical at all: "Does attorney James Schroeder, spouse of U.S. Rep. Patricia Schroeder, pay enough attention to his family? Does Richard Blum gaze adoringly when his wife, newly elected U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, makes a speech? Does developer John Zaccaro, husband of 1984 Democratic candidate for vice president, Geraldine Ferraro, bake cookies?" Corcoran then points out that, although Hillary Clinton is a powerhouse attorney with a long line of professional accomplishments, during the 1992 presidential campaign the press focused on her devotion to husband and family, her public image, and her baking skills. Why? Corcoran offers two explanations: one, these reporters didn't know how to write about this "new woman," or, two, it is simply the nature of the press to present an oversimplified and superficial picture rather than to write about ideas. Although I agree that the press tends to choose the easy, simple (and often sensational) story over the hard, complex truth, in this. case this tendency is encouraged by the cultural bias which holds women to different—and often higher—standards than it does men. The "liberated" woman is free to do (or at least attempt to do) many things her mother would never have dared to dream of, but she is not free from doing the same things her mother did. She can have a career, but she also must keep an immaculate house, cook gourmet meals, attend PTA meetings, and attend to the needs of her family. If she decides to do both, she must do both well. Even if she succeeds, she is still vulnerable to criticism. Old ideas die hard, and the high approval ratings for former first lady Barbara Bush and the mixed response to Hillary Clinton indicate that people are still more comfortable with the stay-at-home wife and mother than they are with the high-powered career woman....

COMMENTS ON THE SUMMARY

Jennifer Contreras's summary of Corcoran's article is shaped by her interests and by the summary's function in the context of her essay. She is not concerned with sexism in the press in itself (as Corcoran is), but with sexism in the press as an example of sexism in American politics, or even more broadly, of sexism in American culture. As a result, she focuses on Corcoran's general points rather than on the specific case of media coverage of Hillary Clinton during the 1992 presidential campaign. Although in a more general summary the opening paragraph would most likely be ignored, Jennifer quotes it directly because it illustrates the central point she wants to make. Having provided the foundation for her response by summarizing relevant points from Corcoran's article, Jennifer then launches into her own argument. Her summary is not an end in itself but a means to expressing her own ideas; it sets up the general content of her response as well as its basic two-part structure.

Had Jennifer chosen to write on a different issue—for example, whether the press reports the news or invents it—her summary would have emphasized different aspects of the Corcoran article. She might, for instance, have focused on female reporters' specific comments explaining how their "facts" check out or on instances of the press's misrepresenting Hillary Clinton's views and quoting her out of context.

Notice that in introducing Jennifer's essay, I used a brief summary of the article and its context, focusing on the nature of the assignment and on the writer's own interests and purposes. I did this to help explain how Jennifer integrates her summary into her essay. My summary of that sample essay was, of course, shaped by the point I wanted to make about the use of summary.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. In a sentence or two, summarize each of the following paragraphs from books that might be used for college courses, as though you were going to use your summaries for study purposes.

A.

> Universities, like cathedrals and parliaments, are a product of the Middle Ages. The Greeks and the Romans, strange as it may seem, had no universities in the sense in which the word has been used for the past seven or eight centuries. They had higher education, but the terms are not synonymous. Much of their instruction in law, rhetoric, and philosophy it would be hard to surpass, but it was not organized into the form of permanent institutions of learning. A great teacher like Socrates gave no diplomas; if a modern student sat at his feet for three months, he would demand a certificate, something tangible and external to show for it-an excellent theme, by the way, for a Socratic dialogue. Only in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries do there emerge in the world those features of organized education with which we are most familiar, all that machinery of instruction represented by faculties and colleges and courses of study, examinations and commencements and academic degrees. In all these matters we are the heirs and successors, not of Athens and Alexandria, but of Paris and Bologna.
>
> Charles Homer Haskins, *The Rise of Universities*

B.

> The commonsense view would have it that we live through a certain sequence of events, some more and some less important, the sum of which is our biography. To compile a biography, then, is to record these events in chronological order or in the order of their importance. But even a purely chronological record raises the problem of just what events should be included, since obviously not everything the subject of the record ever did could be

covered. In other words, even a purely chronological record forces one to raise questions concerning the relative importance of certain events. This becomes especially clear in deciding on what historians call "periodization." Just when in the history of Western civilization should one consider the Middle Ages to have begun? And just when in the biography of an individual can one assume that his youth has come to an end? Typically, such decisions are made on the basis of events that the historian or the biographer considers to have been "turning points" —say, the coronation of Charlemagne, or the day on which Joe Blow decides to join the church and remain faithful to his wife. However, even the most optimistic historians and biographers (and, just as important, autobiographers) have moments of doubts as to the choice of these particular events as the truly decisive ones. Perhaps, they may say, it is not the coronation of Charlemagne bur his conquest of the Saxons that should be taken as the great turning point. Or perhaps it was the point at which Joe gave up his ambition to become a writer that should mark the beginning of *his* middle age. The decision for one as against another event obviously depends on one's frame of reference.

Peter Berger, *Invitation to Sociology*

C.

In this essay, "normal science" means research firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements, achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for its further practice. Today such achievements are recounted, though seldom in their original form, by science textbooks, elementary and advanced. These textbooks expound the body of accepted theory, illustrate many or all of its successful applications, and compare these applications with exemplary observations and experiments. Before such books became popular early in the nineteenth century (and until even more recently in the newly matured sciences), many of the famous classics of science fulfilled a similar function. Aristotle's *Physico,* Ptolemy's *Almagest,* Newton's *Principia* and *Opticks,* Franklin's *Electricity,* Lavoisier's *Chemistry,* and Lyell's *Geology*—these and many other works served for a time implicitly to define the legitimate problems and methods of a research field for succeeding generations of practitioners. They were able to do so because they shared two essential characteristics. Their achievement was sufficiently unprecedented to attract an enduring group of adherents away from competing modes of scientific activity. Simultaneously, it was sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group of practitioners to resolve.

Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

D.

Numerous observers have described women's speech as being different from that of men. (We should observe immediately the bias inherent in that observation, since it uses men's speech as the norm against which women's speech is judged. We could just as well ask how men's speech differs from that of women, but investigators have not usually gone about the task of looking at differences in that way.) In the linguistic literature perhaps the most famous example of linguistic differentiation between the sexes is said to occur in the Lesser Antilles of the West Indies among the Carib Indians. Male and female Caribs are said to speak different languages, the result of a long-ago conquest in which a group of invading Carib-speaking men killed the local Arawak-speaking men and mated with the Arawak women. The descendants of these Carib-speaking men and Arawak-speaking women are sometimes described as having different languages for men and women. There are, for example, differences in the genders ascribed to abstract nouns, with these treated grammatically as feminine by males and masculine by females. The differences actually do not result in two "separate" or "different" languages, but rather one language with noticeable sex-based characteristics (Taylor, 1951b). Funher investigations of other languages show us that these kinds of differences between men and women are really quite widespread. The interesting question is why this should be so.

Ronald Wardhaugh, *An Introduction to Socio-Linguistics*

2. Using any method or combination of methods for selecting material, write a summary of anyone of the following passages from *Scientific American* magazine.

A.

[COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL REMOVED]

B.

[COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL REMOVED]

C.

[COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL REMOVED]

D.

[COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL REMOVED]

3. Using any method or combination of methods for selecting material, write a summary of either the following passage by Thomas Inge on the influence of Charles Schulz's cartoon strip *Peanuts* or the passage by Larry Brown, "Hunger in the U.S.," on page 66. Your summary should be about one-quarter the length of the original and should include all the significant information of the original Next write a very short summary (about 50 words) to convey only the main ideas of the passage you have ·chosen. Be prepared to discuss the differences between the long and short summaries.

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4. Write short summaries (roughly 25 words each) of three papers you have written for previous courses. The abstracts are to inform other members of the class of the kinds of interests and ideas you have.

5. Imagine that one of your teachers has announced a quiz on a five-page section from the textbook for the next day. That evening you receive a phone call from a close friend and classmate who is out of town playing with a rock band. You tell your friend about the test, but he has left the textbook home and will not be returning until fifteen minutes before the next class. As a good friend, you offer to meet him before class with a summary. Using a five-page section of any textbook from one of your current courses, prepare such a summary.

6. For an appropriate college course, rewrite the children's story "The Three Little Pigs" in summary form so that the summary may serve as an example of one of the following themes:

a. In times of need, one should rely on family members to provide shelter and help.
b. An obsessive desire for security is an appropriate response to a threatening world.
c. The destructive alienation of the villain type of personality only leads to further isolation, frustration, and hatred for the world.

If you wish, you may substitute any other children's story with which you are familiar. Be sure, however, to identify a theme or idea for which the summary is to serve as an example.

7. To share with your classmates your reactions to a selection you have already summarized for this chapter, write a short essay (100-200 words) presenting your thoughts. Begin the discussion with a brief summary of the ideas to which you are reacting.

8. Imagine you are taking a political science course. Your instructor asks you to read the following selection, “Hunger in the U.S.,” and then to write a 300-word essay discussing what you believe the government's responsibility for feeding its citizens should be. As part of your discussion use relevant information and ideas summarized from the article.

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