

MEMO: GUIDELINES FOR WRITING ANALYTICAL SUMMARIES

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Purpose: this memo provides the guidelines for writing analytical summaries, which are one page summaries of an article. It provides the key desiderata for the summaries and a 'how to' section that describes a procedure for writing excellent summaries.

FORMAT: Analytical summaries are one page, single space summaries of an article. The summary must be typed in 12 point font. Use paragraphs and indent them. Do not write a one page paragraph, as that is very difficult to read. Do not write a cover page. A model summary is given as an example.

DESIDERATA, or 'the three Cs'

Comprehensiveness: the summary should summarize all of the main points of the article. Points will be taken off if there are important points that are missing. Pay attention to the details, but make sure they are used in support of the main points and they do not cause the reader to lose focus on the main themes of the article.

Clarity: try to cover the main points in the limited space, without vague or imprecise language. Use straightforward and direct language, like you were explaining each point to a classmate. Also, use colloquial and idiomatic expressions to vary the prose.

Cogent organization and writing: organize your summary points and use good essay structure (see also the memo on Writing Standards). Use topic sentences for each paragraph and make sure order of each paragraph makes sense.

PROCEDURE

1. Read the entire article first, writing comments in the margins to clarify points and ask questions if you do not understand anything about the piece.
2. On a piece of scratch paper, write out the principal points and arguments made in the article. What is the article about, and what are the major conclusions? Write out in skeleton form how each argument is developed and how a larger conclusion is reached.
3. Now that the main points are known, write an outline of how to convey them in a five paragraph summary.

Tip: in making the outline, be analytical, not chronological. That is, do not reproduce each point as it is written chronologically in the article. This always obscures the larger argument. Instead, think of how the main points are related and try to integrate them into your paragraphs.

4. Write your summary, starting first with a rough draft that will not be submitted. Re-write and re-write until the organization is right and the major points are communicated clearly and directly.