Summarizing

# When do you summarize?

There are a number of reasons to summarize. You may want to tell a friend about a movie or a book. As a student in an academic setting, you may need to recap the research findings in a scholarly journal article. You might use this summary as supportive evidence in an essay or when preparing an annotated bibliography that includes several articles, books, or other resources for a research paper you will write.

While a summary doesn’t necessarily include your own analysis of the original text, you may be asked to provide your analysis as part of your summary, so be sure to check the assignment directions for specifics on this – especially if you are being asked to do an annotated bibliography.

# Steps to summarizing

Here are some helpful steps that can be useful in preparing a summary:

1. Read the resource material with the purpose of understanding the main message and ideas of the author.
2. Depending on the length of the material, after reading a portion or all of it, put it aside and write the ideas you remember in your own words.
3. Check against the original to see that you have captured the meaning. Add anything you didn’t remember that you think is critical to include.
4. You will want to ensure that you do not use the author’s phrases or sentence structure in your own version.
5. Be sure to include the in-text citation at the end of the summary if you are including it in a research paper. If creating an annotated bibliography, follow the formatting instructions of your instructor or the MLA/APA guidelines.

## Example 1—summary only:

Jane L. David’s article “What Research Says About Grade Retention” offers insight into the controversy over the last 40 years about whether to hold a failing student back a grade or to socially promote him. David says that, with the goal of helping a student catch up to his peers and with the recent emphasis on students performing well on high-stakes state tests, grade retention is regaining popularity even though research over the decades shows inconclusive evidence that students did better or worse than those passed on to the next grade. Most studies revealed that a retained student had no better outcome than one socially promoted with his classmates and, in fact, sometimes experienced more serious consequences. David suggests that, whether held back or promoted, a successful outcome for a struggling student lies in the interventions given to the student in the form of other options, such as before/after school tutoring programs, summer scholastic opportunities, and help during the school day (83-84).

## Example 2 – an analysis paragraph to include in an annotated bibliography:

David is the Director of the Bay Area Research Group and has been a contributing author for a variety of educational publications. Her expertise lends credibility to the topic of my research paper, and I plan to use her findings to help support my claim that grade retention can do more harm than good for students. It is important to note that David has followed research over nearly 50 years and that she references six reputable sources for this article.

**Source text:**

David, Jane L. “What Research Says About Grade Retention,” Educational Leadership, vol. 65, no.6, March 2008, retrieved from www.ascd.org/publications/educational leadership/mar08/vol65/num06/Grade-Retention.aspx