**How to Write a Summary of a Non-Fiction Work**

A summary is a brief restatement, in your own words, of the content of a passage. This restatement should focus on the central idea of the passage and include, in condensed form, the main points in the passage that support or explain the central idea. A summary should reflect the order in which these points are presented and the emphasis given to them. A summary will accurately reflect the author’s ideas and will not contain any of your own opinions or conclusions. A good summary is brief, accurate, and objective.

1. Read the passage carefully. Look for the author’s central idea.
2. Reread the passage. Divide the passage into sections or stages of thought. The author’s use of paragraphing will often be a useful guide. Label each section or stage of thought. Underline key passages.
3. On a separate sheet of paper, write one-sentence summaries of each section or stage of thought.
4. Determine the author’s central idea and write a one-sentence summary of the central idea. If a thesis statement exists in the original passage, you may want to quote it directly in your summary. Remember to use quotation marks whenever you lift four or more words verbatim from a source.
5. Begin writing your summary with a carefully worded sentence that includes the author, title, genre, and purpose.

EXAMPLE: In John Steinbeck’s classic American book about social protest, *The Grapes of Wrath*, the author describes the struggle of tenant farmers who were forced off their land in Oklahoma and migrated to California to find work.

1. Add to this first sentence your one-sentence summaries of the sections or states of thought in the passage. You may need to expand these one-sentence summaries with significant supporting detail from the passage, but eliminate repetition and less important information. Ask yourself, “What does my reader need to know in order to understand what this passage is about?” Use as few words as possible to convey the central idea and main supporting points.
2. Read over your summary, checking for accuracy and completeness.
3. Revise your summary, inserting transitional words and phrases where necessary to ensure coherence. Avoid a series of short, choppy sentences: combine sentences for a smooth, logical flow of ideas.