



Academic Support Center

Writing a Summary/Response

Summary:

The purpose of writing a summary is to explain to others, in a concise and clear way, what you have read without adding your own opinion.

Step One: Read the piece through once. If you have no idea what's going on in it, read it again.

Step Two: In one sentence, state the title, author, and overall thrust of the piece you read.

Step Three: Go back to the piece and explain, in order as they appear, the main points or events in the essay. Make sure to explain these points in your own words.

Step Four: Write a last line that sums up the article, again in your own words.

Step Five: Go back to the sentences you have written and find transitions/links that will improve the flow of your writing.

Response:

After you summarize, it is your chance to respond to what you read, to offer an opinion. Here are some questions to ask yourself when generating ideas for a written response:

- What did you think about the essay?
- How do you feel about what was said?
- What parts did you like or dislike?
- Do you agree or disagree (or a little of both) with the point the author is making?
- Have you, or anyone you know, had any similar experiences?
- What is the bigger picture here?
- Has this reading made you think about anything in a different way?
- Have you read or heard anything that applies to what the author said?
- Does the evidence in the article support the statements the writer made?

Sample Summary/Response

“Just Walk on By: A Black Man Ponders His Power to Alter Public Space”

In his essay, “Just Walk on By: A Black Man Ponders His Power to Alter Public Space,” Brent Staples explains how throughout his life, others have discriminated against him because he is a tall, black man who works as a journalist in a predominantly white field. As he explains, he first realized how much his appearance frightened others, particularly a white woman, when he used to take late night walks as a graduate student. While he understands that we live in a culture that has become increasingly violent and dangerous, he feels frustrated that black men, in particular, are still being judged and misjudged based on their appearance alone. For example, he cites two instances where he was mistaken for a burglar and a fellow journalist was mistaken for a killer. These incidents, he claims, are not uncommon. In order to deal with the misunderstandings on others’ parts, Staples says that now when he has the urge to go out for a late night walk, he whistles classical music as a way of assuring others that he is not a dangerous man. His whistling, he concludes, allows others to see him for who he really is: a cultured and sensitive man.

When I read this essay, I felt sorry for the author who is obviously an intelligent and sensitive man who is constantly misjudged by others. It doesn’t seem fair that others would feel fear when they encounter him just because he is a tall black man out for a walk. I admire his ability to try to understand other people’s behavior rather than becoming bitter or violent. While it’s sad that he had to come up with a way to calm people’s fears, whistling classical music is a pretty clever way to go about it. This essay also made me think about people who are misjudged like this every day. We assume that a young girl with multiple piercings and purple hair cannot be an honors student. A group of young teenagers smoking cigarettes must be looking for trouble. That old white-haired lady couldn’t be an expert skier. These seem like relatively minor examples, but this kind of stereotypical thinking is what leads to the more serious type of prejudice Brent Staples faces. It’s similar to the racial profiling that Muslims have faced ever since the events of 9/11. When we start assuming people are criminals just because of the color of their skin, it shows just how dangerous jumping to conclusions can be. I know I’m going to be more careful about this in the future.