An academic summary tells the main points of a source text in brief form. As a condensed version of the source material, it can range anywhere from a couple of sentences to a short summary article, depending on the length of the source and your purposes for writing. In writing a summary, you need to select the most important points of the source text and report on (vs. react to) them using your own words. You can combine several important points from the source into a brief general statement, or go more in depth and relate minor points as well, again depending on the purpose of your summary. Experts suggest, however, that a good rule of thumb to follow is that a summary is never more than about one-quarter the length of the original, though in most cases it is much briefer. Also, keep in mind that a summary must always be written in your own words, or if not, should contain direct quotations. To ignore this rule is plagiarism.

Some Purposes and Uses of Summaries:

- preparing for exams
- taking notes on your readings
- collecting and condensing information for research papers
- integrating sources into your writing

A good academic summary succeeds when it does the following:

- It identifies the author and the source (book or article). A summary typically contains this information in the first sentence. Expressions you can use to introduce this information include: “According to [the author]. . . .”; “In his/her book [title], [the author] states that . . . .”
- It gives credit to the author throughout. To make it clear that the ideas presented are the author’s and not your own, you should frequently use signals like “[The author] also states that . . . .”
- It begins by offering a broad overview of the material (one or two sentences), which is then developed in more detail in the body of the summary.
- It uses quotation marks and page references whenever a phrase, a part of a sentence, or a complete sentence is taken directly from the source text. But it also quotes selectively and sparingly.
- It is brief, but thorough enough to accomplish its purposes.
- It is an accurate reflection of the author’s viewpoint throughout. Therefore, carefully reading of the source is essential.