

# Writing Summaries

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The purpose of a summary is to describe the author's purpose, arguments or main ideas, and conclusions. Your own point of view or response is *not* part of the summary. Usually, summaries are written for articles and reviews are written for books. Use the following process to write a good summary:

- Read the article *without* making any marks or highlighting.
- Write one sentence that expresses, *in your own words*, the point of the article.
- Go back to the article and find the *author's thesis statement*. Does it correspond with what you said in your own words? If not, adjust your sentence. If you are sure that you have selected the thesis statement, highlight it in colour #1.
- Re-read the article, highlighting the *major points* that support the author's thesis:
  - Use highlighter colour #2.
  - Words and phrases only - no complete sentences.
- Circle *transitional elements* that show how the parts of the argument or explanation are related (however, therefore, in addition, consequently, on the other hand, etc).
- Make an *outline* of the article, based on your highlighting.
- *Write* a draft of the summary:
  - Your first sentence should include the name of the author, the name of the article, and the main idea of the article.
  - Include all the major ideas in the article, but do not include all details and examples.
  - Your last sentence should be a conclusion about the significance of the article from the author's point of view, not from yours.
- *Edit* and revise the draft:
  - Is it long enough? Too long?
  - Does it clearly express the author's main idea?
  - Does it cover all the major points?
  - Does it have three main sections: introduction, body, conclusion?
  - Does it read smoothly? Are the parts related?
- *Proofread* the summary:
  - Check for common errors: grammar, spelling, punctuation.

***If We Are So Rich, Why Aren't We Happy?***

Summary of article by Mihaly Csikszentimihalyi  
*American Psychologist* October 1999, Volume 54 Number 10

In the article *If we are so Rich, Why aren't we Happy*, Mihaly Csikszentimihalyi presents his *positive psychology* interpretation of the dynamics of happiness, which he calls "flow." Flow is the word used to describe the process of being so engrossed in an experience that it becomes "autotelic," or worth doing for its own sake.

Csikszentimihalyi discusses the typical responses to the state of flow and also the common characteristics of the experience, and emphasizes that it is the process - the sense of involvement - that is important, not the product. The author also points out the limits of flow, such as the tendency for activities to be enjoyable in the short run, but not in the long run, and for people to become dependent on flow activities and neglect the development of others.

Reflecting on the common contemporary Western assumption that equates the accumulation of material goods with happiness, Csikszentimihalyi outlines the sociocultural and psychological reasons why this is not so: disparity of wealth, lack of alternative values, escalating expectations, and lack of physical energy left over to pursue other contributing goals.

Csikszentimihalyi points out that ancient traditions and contemporary psychology have in common the use of cognition to effect conscious change and subsequent improvement of the quality of human experience. In summary, the author emphasizes that flow is actually a process rather than a condition, and that it requires skills, concentration, and perseverance.