

Research Basics

Establish Framework

- ▶ Establish context, basic message, audience needs/wants, and purpose(s) through Situation Analysis.
- ▶ Hypothesize a solution and identify evidence and sources that would convince your audience.
- ▶ Determine urgency (context) and media (email, letter, fax, memo, short report, formal report or ...?)

Locate Relevant Data

- ▶ State the central problem/opportunity precisely but concisely in terms of audience benefit
- ▶ Solve the problem: searching—recording—documenting—reporting
- ▶ Keep focused on audience & purpose throughout the process:
 - Ask the right questions—use *Situation Analysis* results as guide
 - Focus on what's relevant/essential—audience needs/wants & your purpose(s)
 - Evaluate findings in terms of context & audience—relevance, credibility, suitability?
 - Interpret findings for this specific context & audience—conclusive, probable, inconclusive?

Explore credible secondary sources

- ▶ Discover what is already known about the subject in terms of your context, audience & purpose: *use this as a basis for preparing effective questions for your primary research later.*
- ▶ Use the internet for sweeping searches to get a sense of what is available and current. Follow-up with library hard copy once you have a sense of what's available.
- ▶ Locate, summarize & synthesize data in terms of your audience's use in its context.

Explore credible primary sources—fine-tune secondary discoveries

- ▶ Reinforce and expand on the data uncovered by your secondary research by interviewing local experts who can help you focus the general data on your specific context, audience and purpose:
- ▶ Use surveys & questionnaires sparingly, especially if you need specific details and have limited time.

Record, Summarize, Synthesize & Document Findings

- ▶ Summarize & synthesize key information (see attached handouts)
- ▶ Determine what to quote and what to paraphrase—clarity!
- ▶ Develop explanations that clearly link your data to this context, audience and purpose *for your reader.*
- ▶ Support critical claims with argument & evidence—*prove your claims rather than simply assert them!* Back up everything your audience might question.
- ▶ Avoiding reasoning traps
 - faulty causal reasoning
 - faulty statistical reasoning
 - specious conclusions
- ▶ Document your sources
 - MLA/APA footnoting in body of message—parenthetical citation (see handouts)
 - WORKS CITED (MLA)/REFERENCES (APA) at message end

Interview basics

Effective questioning involves a mix of the following options, switching between them in order to keep going a productive flow of useful information.

For example, at various points in an interview, the questioner will start off with a primary, open question designed to get the speaker started then, depending on that opening answer, the interviewer will follow up with secondary questions (neutral and/or leading) designed to get the speaker to commit himself/herself more and more clearly on aspects of the original answer. When that avenue is exhausted, the interviewer will begin a new phase with another primary question.

The interviewer's strategy will vary throughout the interview depending upon the information sought and/or the kind of answers that are coming.

Primary&Secondary

- ▶ **Primary**—Introduces a topic or define a new area of discussion
Shall we turn to . . .
Could we begin by discussing . . .
Let's go back to . . .
- ▶ **Secondary**—follow-up primary / interviewee did not give enough or has opened up another facet worth exploring.
If that is true, how do you explain . . . ?

Open&Closed

- ▶ **Open**—no restriction: respondent can take answer any direction he/she wishes.
Why do you think customers are so reluctant to
- ▶ **Closed**—the question anticipates a correct answer.
You mentioned three conditions for withdrawal: what were they again?

Neutral&Leading

Neutral

- ▶ No correct or preferred answer or direction
- ▶ Usually open and exploratory.

Leading

- ▶ Suggests a preferred answer by easing the way for one and making others difficult:
As the mother of 19 children, you obviously have strong feelings about birth control.
- ▶ Very useful in persuasive interviews (sales & religious pitches) when it's appropriate to corner the interviewee and force an accurate answer:
Clearly this car suits your needs perfectly; how would you like to pay for it—our loan service or your bank's?
- ▶ Can put one on defensive :
You do like this, don't you?

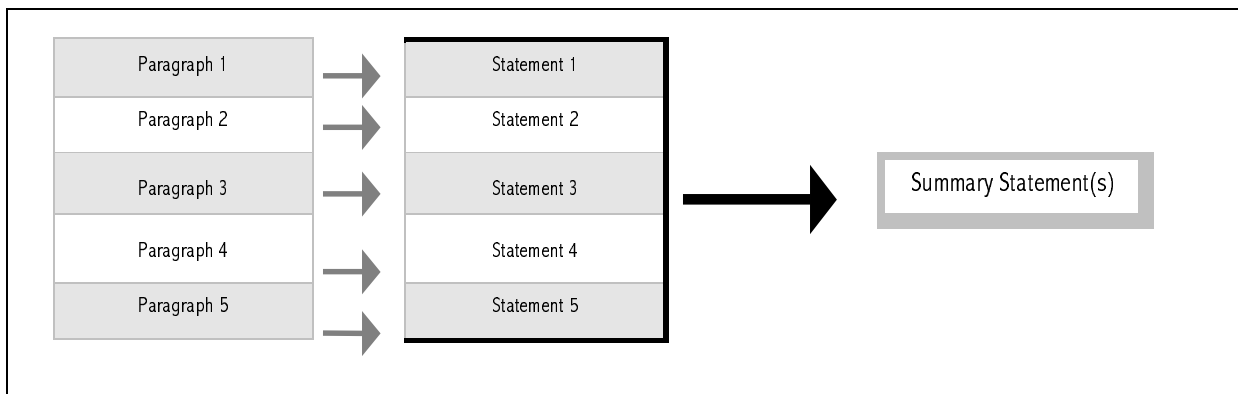
Summary basics

Purpose: To condense essential thoughts of a longer piece of writing into short, readable, accurate summary, approximately 10% of the length of the original.

BasicStrategy

1. Read through entire work in order to gain an overview.
2. Determine the length of your summary by your needs.
3. Apportion space according to the essential elements of the material.
4. Select the main points (often by looking for topic sentences in the paragraphs of the longer piece).
5. Omit all extraneous comments. Avoid including your opinion of the material.
6. Paragraph according to the material, not the original author' s breaks. Rewriting in your own words.
7. Write from the author' s point of view, not yours.
8. Be faithful to the author' s emphasis and interpretation.
9. Avoid the author' s phrasing and sentence structure: don' t quote except for particular emphasis.
10. Do not write a paraphrase.

Rorabacher, Louise E., Georgia Dunbar, and Clement Dunbar. ASSIGNMENTS IN EXPOSITION. 9th ed. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988.



Suggestions

- ▶ Number all the paragraphs for easy reference.
- ▶ Work with existing topic sentences if possible. If the key idea is not readily apparent in one statement, or if it is spread over two or three statements, condense it in your own words. *Write these statements on a separate page with the paragraph number(s) beside each!* It' s much easier to *see at a glance* the direction of the article/essay when all you are looking at is a series of statements rather than marked statements in a maze of typeface.
- ▶ Group the *statements* that discuss common ideas and attempt to create a comprehensive statement to cover each group. This degree of brevity is not always possible, but try to be as brief as possible . . . but not at the expense of accuracy!
- ▶ Study the title, secondary headings and opening paragraph closely. Can you use any of that information to help you create a thesis statement to provide direction for your summary?

Note: in your final draft, you do not have to follow the organizational order of the original article. You can rearrange it any way you like for brevity and clarity provided you do not change either the meaning or the tone of the original. In fact, most good summaries do change the order because they are simply reproducing the *essential ideas* of the original: they do not have to concern themselves with getting the reader' s attention, building towards a climax, providing illustrations and examples, etc.

Synthesis basics

Often the *Situation Analysis* makes you aware of the need for additional information in a form or combination not currently available to your audience. You can locate and summarize what is available, but you are still left with the task of developing precisely what the audience needs—you must synthesize the relevant data into new information, immediately useful for your audience.

Synthesis Components

You are looking for information that has not yet been created in the form your audience requires. The task may simply involve combining what is there in a new way that permits the audience to understand and use it immediately. Or you may have to sift through data suitable for other applications, extract what's relevant, add your own insight(s), and then put that new data into a form that your audience can understand and use. Your analysis and insights are essential to this process.

- ▶ Relevant data and applications currently available to you and your audience
- ▶ Summaries of relevant information researched on behalf of your audience
- ▶ Insights, judgments and conclusions resulting from your analysis of available information, leading to new information immediately applicable to your audience and only available through you

Basic Synthesis Strategy

1. SMART the process thoroughly to develop a working plan for determining/providing what your audience needs to understand and act now.
2. Locate, summarize and document relevant information.
3. Apply critical thinking to determine what is lacking in available information—and why: (Jones 5)
 - a. Examine assumptions (yours too!)
 - b. Separate fact from opinion—use facts as reference points
 - c. Look for possible explanations, causes & solutions—be flexible and open minded
 - d. Avoid fallacious arguments, ambiguity and manipulative reasoning
 - e. Stay focused on your overall objective as you work through the details
4. Record your conclusions/findings in terms of
 - a. Audience need
 - b. Your purpose
 - c. What's currently available
5. Explain how you arrived at your insights/conclusions—argument & evidence strategies
6. Point the audience to appropriate action

Summary

Situation analysis is not only a critical *starting point* for this process, it keeps the entire process *focused on what is essential* throughout. Put a hold on PVC until you have gathered and analyzed, all existing information, relevant to your audience's needs. Look for combinations, approaches and solutions that others have missed so far, and then add your insight to create fresh information that solves the audience's problem and gives it an informed course of action. Back up those insights with argument and evidence.

Synthesis pulls all of the other elements together. The *Situation Analysis* starts and guides the process. Research and summary skills locate and extract relevant information. Critical thinking helps you locate what others have missed. Arguments and evidence establish the reliability of your data and findings. Graphics illustrate, precisely and concisely, complex data and relationships. And the PVC strategy helps you package the final product so that the audience can read, understand, use and recall the information with speed and accuracy.