**Summaries, Abstracts and Bibliographies, oh my!: How to Approach Summaries in CCI/ICCI**

Writing summaries is perhaps one of the most challenging of writing activities, primarily because it requires very close reading of a text and a clear understanding of what an author is attempting to communicate as well as its rhetorical and contextual contents. However, always remember that summaries of the same text may vary depending on why the summarizer has read the text, the who the summarizer is writing form, and what the purpose of the summary is.

A summary in its most basic definition synthesizes a text or a part of a text and presents it more concisely than its original form. It is shorter and generally focuses on the main point or gist of the original text. In other words it focuses on the highlights without providing all the details. We can summarize individual paragraphs of a text, sections of a text, or the text as a whole. While summaries are always expected to be shorter than the text we are summarizing, the longer the original text, the longer our summary might be. A summary of an entire text will obviously have more information than the summary of a paragraph or section.

When summaries *re*present an entire text they are often called **abstracts** (other terms include **synopsis** and **précis**). We often find abstracts in academic journal articles where the abstract provides an overview of the article to the reader. Summaries or abstracts are what make an annotated bibliography *annotated.*

There generally is no single correct summary of any text. While there are general guidelines for summaries (see below) the content of a summary is determined by the summarizer and his or her focus or interest in a text. This is especially true for longer and more complex texts where it is impossible to create a relatively short summary that focuses on every point the author is making. Therefore, summarizers often emphasize what was important or stood out to them.

**Multiple Types of Summaries**

Summaries can take many forms and even combine different forms. Here are a few:

**Descriptive Summaries** provide an overview of the text, focusing on what the text is about and the points the author is making. Descriptive summaries provide an accurate representation of what the text is about and what it does.

**Evaluative Summaries** consider certain aspects of the text, such as the credibility of the author, the validity of the information or evidence, or the usefulness of the information contained in the text. Evaluation can extend to most any aspect of the text, such as its style, rhetoric, organization, readability, etc.

**Comparative Summaries** relate the text to other relevant texts focusing on how it is different from others and perhaps explaining why. Sometimes comparative summaries make up what is called a literature review*.*

**Response Summaries are** generally written from the perspective of the summarizer and focuses as much on the summarizers thoughts as the text itself.

All of these summaries are important to readers and writers since each offer a way to understand their readings, expand their own knowledge, and to engage in conversations in new ways. However, the descriptive summary is generally what finds its way to academic annotated bibliographies and is the type of summary most college courses ask students to prepare. It is the type of summary expected on your CCI/ICCI Annotated Bibliography.

**Focus on Descriptive Summaries**

A descriptive summary restates what a text actually says. A description generally provides…

* The gist or overarching main point of the text and its purpose.
* Rhetorical context for understanding the text
* The key claims/ideas the author presents in the text.
* Carefully selected examples to illustrate the author’s points/ideas.

Descriptive summaries are always written for a reader who is not familiar with the text at hand. They are also written for summarizers to help them remember the text and have something to refer back to when they are writing. And, in many classroom situations, they are written so an instructor can evaluate how well a student understood a text. So while summaries are brief, it is important that they are comprehensive.

A descriptive summary is written in an objective voice (no “I”) and it is always clear that the ideas in the summary belong to the authors (attributions). It is very important that descriptive summaries are accurate—stating the author’s message and content is an ethical responsibility.

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**Sample Descriptive Summary**

In Annotated Bibliographies sources are introduced with a formal citation.

It helps readers to understand the text if they know its type and something about the author.

Graff, Gerald. (2015). Hidden intellectualism. In G. Graff, G. Graff, C. Birkenstien, R. Durst (Eds.), *They say, I say* (pp. 264-270). New York: Norton.

In this essay, Graff asks other college professors and students to rethink their definition of intellectualism and to see the connection between street smarts and school smarts. Graff, a professor of English Education at the University of Illinois, uses his own personal experience as a kid who was not interested in academics but who was interested in sports. Graff recounts how he and his friends thought sports was cool but that academics were not. However, he also explains how he now understands how his interest in sports represented the same elements teachers associate with intellectualism: “challenging arguments, debates, problems for analysis, and intricate statistics.” His message for instructors is that intellectualism is not limited to academic topics, such as Shakespeare. Instructors should help students see their nonacademic interests through “academic eyes.” His message to students is that they don’t have to make a choice between being street smart and cool and being an intellectual. Students can, and should, be both.

The gist states the general point/purpose of the text.

An example of how the author illustrates his ideas.

Key claims more specifically stated than the gist.

Connect the ideas to the author (highlighted phrases) throughout the summary.

Attributions are best when they use verbs that capture authorial action.