



CREATING A SUMMARY IN YOUR OWN WORDS

You might have noticed that even when you get the sense or gist of a piece while you are reading, you can find yourself at a loss for words when you try to summarize it in your own words. Summarizing can be challenging because it is a surprisingly creative act -- creative not in the sense of being artsy or wildly novel, but in the sense that you create, or construct, a meaningful translation of someone else's ideas into your own words. Such translation, or meaning making, of what you have read or observed requires that you form and consolidate new connections between things; that is hard mental work.

Below are four **question/prompt** pairs to use as guides to creating a summary. The order of the questions outlines the basic structure of a summary. Each question has been turned into a prompt which you can use as a "running start" for one sentence of your summary.

1. What **observations** appear to the writer to be **in tension with one another** or to indicate an apparent puzzle, problem, discrepancy, oversight, mystery, contradiction, or surprise?

The observations that are held in tension in the writer's mind are . . .

1)

and . . .

2)

2. What **unresolved guiding/governing question** follows from these competing observations? That is, what question does the writer set out to address?

This writer sets out to address the question of . . .

3. **How** does the writer go about trying to address or resolve that question? That is, what **supporting/subordinate questions** does the writer pose in the service of addressing the guiding/governing question?

The writer approaches this question by asking/considering . . .

4. What **conclusion** (or headway toward an answer) does the writer offer in response to the unresolved and guiding/governing question?

The writer concludes that . . .