



# The Writing Center at Bristol Community College

Building B - Room 117  
508-678- 2811 X2544

E-mail: [writing.center@bristolcc.edu](mailto:writing.center@bristolcc.edu)  
Website: [www.bristolcc.edu/writingcenter](http://www.bristolcc.edu/writingcenter)

## Writing an Effective Summary

Howard Tinberg  
Donnie McGee

### What is a summary?

- ◆ A summary is a restatement, in your own words, of the main points of a passage or text. **As with a direct quotation, your source must be cited and listed as part of your bibliography.**

### How does a summary differ from a quotation?

- ◆ A quotation reproduces or matches a source word for word.

### How do I go about summarizing?

- ◆ Read the original passage thoroughly first, underlining key terms and concepts as you go.
- ◆ Read the passage again, this time glossing critical points in the reading: writing, in the margins, what you consider to be the meaning (using your own words).
- ◆ Review your glosses, highlighting those that you consider significant to the reading's purpose and core meaning. Pay attention to the title of the work as well as the opening and closing paragraphs or sections to get a sense of the key point or points made in the work.
- ◆ Place your source aside, and, on a separate piece of paper (or on index card), write down what you remember as critical points in the source.
- ◆ Review your underlining and glosses to see if you've captured the main ideas, making adjustments if necessary.
- ◆ **Integrate your summary within your own writing by making plenty of references to your source. Use signal phrases that name your source:**
  - "According to Greg Jones, ..."
  - "The article also discusses ..."
  - "Jones also emphasizes ..."
  - "The author, Greg Jones, believes that ..."
  - "Jones argues that..."
  - "Jones is concerned that ..."
- ◆ Check your summary against the original for meaning.

**Consider these examples.** (The passage is taken from Tinberg, Howard. *Border Talk: Writing and Knowing in the Two-Year College*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1997.)

#### *The original passage:*

What we teach and how we teach must reflect the diverse needs of our students: the needs of those who plan to transfer to four-year institutions and the needs of those who intend to enter the workplace immediately upon graduating from the community college; the needs of traditionally aged students and the needs of so-called returning students, who have spent years out of school. (Tinberg vii)

#### *An acceptable summary:*

According to Tinberg, community college faculty need to understand the needs of their students in order to be effective in the classroom, needs which are as varied as the students themselves (Tinberg vii).

#### *A plagiarized version:*

People who teach at community colleges should try to understand the diverse needs of their students, including the needs of those who plan to transfer to four-year institutions and those who intend to enter the workplace directly.