SUMMARIZING

When you write a *paraphrase*, you present everything the author says in his or her paragraph. Paraphrasing can come in handy when all the specific examples are important to show the idea of the source or when you want to show how the author is using the specific examples. But when you write a research paper, you may not need to paraphrase all of the material from a whole source. Imagine trying to paraphrase a whole book or even one chapter! Your essay would be as long as the source, you would not have room for your own ideas, and your reader could just as easily read the original source rather than your paper.

SUMMARIZING

Unlike a paraphrase, a “summary” is a short version of the source. A summary still must be in your words and be marked with a TAG. However, a summary presents only the author’s main idea. Because a summary is short, it is also general. As a short version of the source, the summary does not present all the specific examples as a paraphrase does.

A summary is a relatively brief, objective account, in your own words, of the main ideas in a source passage.

**When you summarize, you will:**

- **Condense the material.** You may have to condense or to reduce the source material to present only the ideas and points that relate to your paper.
- **Omit extras from the material.** You may have to omit or get rid of extra information from the source material to focus on only the author’s main ideas and points.
- **Simplify the material.** You may have to simplify or make easier to understand the most important complex arguments, sentences, or vocabulary in the source material.

If you think of your everyday conversations again, you will see that you use summaries all the time.

- For instance, suppose you have taken a major examination. After class, you meet a friend and she asks about the exam. Because you don't have time to stop and tell her all about it, you say. "It was tough, but I think I did okay." Your answer here is a summary. It gives your friend only a general idea of the exam.
- Compare this short summarized answer to the longer detailed answer you would give if you were having lunch with a friend who asked to hear all about your exam. Then you would probably tell how long the exam was, what the questions were like, how many questions there were, how long it took you to complete them, and so on.
- A summary leaves out these specific details.
**SUMMARIZING EXAMPLES:**

**Example #1**

**Original paragraphs from source:**

What effects does television have on the candidates themselves? It dictates priorities that are different from those of an earlier day. The physical appearance of the candidate is increasingly important. Does he or she look fit, well-rested, secure? Losing candidates like Adlai Stevenson, Hubert Humphrey, and Richard Nixon all seemed to look "bad" on TV. Nixon overcame this problem in 1972 with ads that featured longer shots of him being "presidential"--flying off to China. Close-ups were avoided.

Both John Kennedy and Jimmy Carter seemed more at home with the medium, perhaps because both were youthful, informal, physically active outdoor types. Dwight Eisenhower and Lyndon Johnson seemed to have a paternal, fatherly image on the small screen.


(This is how you would write the source on your MLA Works Cited Page.)

**Summary of paragraph with the MLA parenthetical citation:**

According to Whetmore, because television influences the way we perceive presidential candidates, those who look good on television usually win; those who look bad often lose (63).

Here you can see that we have the general idea without the examples about candidates such as Nixon, Stevenson, Carter, Kennedy and so on.

When you summarize a short part of a source (2 or 3 paragraphs) you **pick out the main idea, and using your own words, you state it in one or two sentences, as I did above in the summary of Whetmore's paragraphs.** When you summarize a whole essay or a chapter from a book, you begin by stating its thesis (the overall idea), and then you state the main ideas from sections or paragraphs that support and develop the thesis. A summary of a whole essay or chapter in a book would probably be about one paragraph. Again, all of this is done in your words.

**Example #2**

**Original passage from source:**

By 1964, there were an estimated 33,500 restaurants in the United States calling themselves “drive-ins,” but only 24,500 offered hot food, the remainder being ice cream and soft drink stands primarily. Layout varied from drive-in to drive-in, but three principal spaces could always be found: a canopy covered driveway adjacent to the building, a kitchen, and a carhop station linking kitchen and parking lot. The smallest drive-ins offered carhop service only, but many also featured indoor lunch counters and booths, sometimes on the scale of the coffee shop.


(This is how you would write the source on your MLA Works Cited Page.)

**Acceptable summary with the MLA parenthetical citation:**

In the chapter “QuickService Restaurants in the Age of Automobile Convenience,” The authors note that by the mid-1960’s, nearly 35,000 self-proclaimed “drive-in” restaurants in the United States existed. Most served hot meals while others served just ice cream and soft drinks. No specific blueprint defined the typical drive-in; however, three characteristics describe this new type of casual eating establishment: a covered driveway, a kitchen, and a carhop station (Jackle and Sculle 55).