

SUMMARIZING

Definitions

“To **summarize** is to extract the main message or central point and restate it in a sentence or two. A summary doesn’t include supporting evidence or details. It is the gist, the hub, the seed of what the author is saying. Also, it isn’t your personal reaction to what the author says.”
(*Handbook For Writers*, p. 127)

A **descriptive abstract** tells what the essay is about, usually in a sentence or two.

Example : In her essay, “Conversational Styles,” Deborah Tannen discusses gender differences among students in classroom performance and offers ways for teachers to adjust teaching styles to address these gender differences.

An **informative abstract (summary)** gives the main ideas presented in the essay.

The summary begins with a sentence that expresses the central idea of the essay. Subsequent sentences state the main supporting ideas in the same order as they appear in the essay. The final sentence closes the summary.

Example:

In her essay “Conversational Styles,” Deborah Tannen discusses how research indicates that the different ways in which men and women use language affects classroom performance. Boys learn to jockey for position in a group; their language learning is more group-oriented and active. Girls interact more intimately, one-on-one with their friends. Thus, classrooms in which discussion is promoted in large groups are more congenial to men than to women. Tannen cites research that demonstrates that this active social play where boys compete carries over in learning styles. Male students are more likely to enjoy the “verbal sparring” and the challenge and response of debate that female students might consider “hostile.”

Tannen also argues that there are gender differences in the way people think about talking in class. Men, she writes, think it’s their responsibility to keep the conversation going in class and to dominate the class if necessary to do this. Women, however, keep track of their individual contributions, withdrawing deliberately in order not to dominate the discussion. As a teacher, Tannen discovered that when she divided her classes into smaller groups, students responded differently than they might in the larger group. Women who tended to be silent in the large group spoke more freely in the smaller groups. Having students observe how they and their classmates contributed to class discussion also influenced the participation level of students. Adjusting classroom activities to take account of these different conversational styles can ensure more equal educational opportunities for all students.

Steps in summarizing:

1. Read the text you want to summarize.
2. Reread the text, highlighting what you think are the main points of the text.
3. Rewrite those points in your own words.
4. Be sure to follow the order of the original text in your summary.
5. Revise the summary, adding important points, deleting examples and details.
6. Be accurate and avoid plagiarism by placing quotation marks around any words or phrases lifted from the original text.

Assignment: Write a descriptive abstract and an informative abstract (summary) of Tannen's essay, "But What Do You Mean?," pp. 271- 278, *The Longman Reader*.