Graded Assignment #1: Summary

This first assignment exercises your ability to identify the core points of an argument and to paraphrase appropriately, two key skills for analyzing arguments and using sources. Due Wednesday, February 7, worth 5% of the course grade. Submit a hard copy.

Write a one-paragraph summary of any one of these essays in Practical Argument: “Online Education Innovators Should Be Wary,” 229-30; “We Bail Out Banks, But Not Desperate Students,” 535-36; or “Smoke Screening,” 709-12. Make your summary about 150-200 words long. Begin by naming the author and identifying the main point or purpose (thesis or position) of the essay.

Tips for Writing a Summary

The author of the essay you are summarizing may or may not state his/her thesis near the beginning of the essay; possibly, the thesis will not be explicitly stated at all. You may need to figure out what the various points add up to.

Similarly, you will need to figure out what other, supporting, points and evidence are important enough to be included in your summary and which can be left out. This requires thinking about the relationships among the ideas. Think of your summary as a shrunken version of the entire original essay; one common mistake is to include a lot of detail for some parts of the essay and leave other parts out.

Another common weakness in summaries is identifying the content without clearly stating the writer’s points. If you find yourself using words like talks about or discusses, consider alternatives such as states, claims, or argues.

Very important: Make sure that you reword the author’s ideas. The ideas should be those in the essay, but the way you express them should be your own. Understand what the author is saying, then say it how you would say it (or at least, in a different way).

Finally, remember that a summary should only state what the original essay says. Don’t critique the essay or express agreement or disagreement with the author. That comes later!

Practical Argument has a section on active reading (56-57) and one on summarizing and paraphrasing (314-318) that may be useful.

What Your Grade Will Be Based On

Is the main idea of the essay correctly identified and clearly stated?
Is the author’s name given?
Does the selection of other points and details reflect their importance in the essay?
Are all points accurately stated?
Are all ideas paraphrased appropriately (put into the summary writer’s words)?
Are grammar, punctuation, word choice, and spelling correct, appropriate, and effective?
Is it one paragraph, 150-200 words long?
Does it follow format guidelines? (double-spaced, etc.)