

## Abstracts and Summaries

An abstract or summary presents the significant information found in a book, article, or other source. Both are primarily, if not totally, paraphrases of the author’s work and contain a few direct quotations. Often an abstract or summary condenses paragraphs or even chapters of analysis or discussion into a sentence or two. Writing an abstract or a summary, then, involves a combination of strong thinking, reading, and writing skills.

The content of an abstract or summary depends on 3 things:

1. the content of the source,
2. the purpose of the assignment, and
3. the needs of the audience.

The finished product should give the reader the essential information found in the source—no more, no less. The following questions can help determine which information is important in an abstract or summary.

- What is the author’s thesis, hypothesis, or research question?
- Why is the author investigating this subject?
- What method(s)/kind(s) of evidence does the author use?
- What are the author’s main arguments or research results?
- What conclusion(s) does the author reach?
- What implications of the research does the author discuss?
- Of what use will this source be to the reader?

ABSTRACTS	SUMMARIES
<p>Abstracts are formal pieces of writing found in reference books for specific subject areas; for example, <i>Chemical Abstracts</i> and <i>An Annotated Bibliography of Feminist Literary Criticism</i> contain abstracts of specific books and articles that are limited in length, by convention, to one paragraph (approximately 225 words) or less. Whether an abstract is part of a larger work or is a single assignment, it should be able to stand by itself. Because researchers use these abstracts to determine the usefulness of specific sources, all bibliographic information required for the researcher to locate the source must also be provided. For specifics, see the MLA or APA documentation guidelines.</p>	<p>Summaries are less formal paraphrases which usually appear in the context of larger works such as research papers, articles, or book reviews. Depending on the purpose of the summary and its relation to the larger work, it may consist of just a few sentences, run for several paragraphs, or be divided by sections of discussion or analysis. When a summary is used in a larger work, it is documented using notes or in-text citations. See the MLA or APA documentation guidelines for specifics.</p>

## Abstract of an Article

(excerpted from *Environmental Abstracts* 79-46083)

Fuhrmann, Ernst. "The Long-Life Car." *Future* 79 (June 1979) : 216.

Described is the "long-life car" research project initiated in 1972 by the F. Porsche Corporation, West Germany, to develop an automobile with an optimum life span of eighteen to twenty-five years. Goals of the project are conservation of energy resources, conservation of material resources, reduction of environmental impact, reduction of overall costs, improvement of operational reliability, and retention of established vehicle concept goals. The critical component in developing the long-life automobile is the body shell, and more research is needed before all aluminum bodies can be mass-produced. The long life car would cost about thirty percent more than the conventional car costs, but would consume less material resources than the conventional car consumes. Employment in the automobile industry would decrease by about four percent over ten years following mass production of the long-life car. (One diagram, nine graphs, four tables.)

## Summary of an Article

(this summary would appear in a larger work and be cited)

A recent article in *The Wall Street Journal* (16 Sept. 1983: 1, 16) presented East and West Germany's plans for maintaining and expanding cooperation in spite of the Cold War and "bitter debate" over nuclear missiles. Both Germanies appear to be more concerned about acting in their own best interest and less as mouthpieces for their respective superpowers. Evidence supporting this claim is the rapid and continuing increase in agricultural and steel imports from West Germany. Also, secret documents indicate that East German Chancellor Helmut Kohn plans to "sell" more political prisoners to Bonn. Publicized measures include improving the postal service between the two countries, cleaning up the dirty rivers between the two countries, and cleaning up the air flowing from East to West Germany. Top West German officials are also discussing a possible \$373 million loan to East Germany. The United States fears that the more West Germany lends to the East, the less reliable an ally it will become. The Soviets, on the other hand, favor inter-German relations because they help keep East Germany solvent.