ALAMO COLLEGES DISTRICT
San Antonio College
Academic Success

The
WRITING
CENTER
at San Antonio College

Summary Vs. Critique

Bright Ideas

The differences between a summary and a critique

While summaries and critiques are relatively easy to write, sometimes it's difficult to tell the differences between one and the other. It's not uncommon for writers to lapse or fall into summarizing (retelling literature's main points in their own words) when the objective is to actually write a critical response (evaluating or assessing literature to share their perspective with their reader). While a brief summary is a part of any well-written critique, the major focus of a critical response is offering an analysis of what you read. In contrast, a summary simply shortens and restates what you read. To make clear the differences between these two critical components of college writing, you should consider what each type of writing should or should not do.

A summary does not

- misrepresent what you read
- use irrelevant or unnecessary details
- analyze or interpret what you read
- judge or evaluate what you read

A summary does

- restate what you read in your own words
- present only the main, or important details
- maintain a neutral and objective stance

A critique does not

- restate what you read
- cover only the main points of what you read
- repeat unimportant or irrelevant details
- have a hostile or overly biased tone or style
- use slang or overly casual language

A critique does

- move beyond summary
- assess or analyze what you need
- offer interpretations and judgments about what you read
- give evidence to support your evaluation

Both the summary and the critique should be written using the literary present tense: the author writes and third person point of view: *he remembers, she points out, the essay (it) has….* Both kinds of writing should include the title of the piece you're writing about and author's full name. Subsequent mention of the author should be by last name, never first name only. Both kinds of writing should be carefully proofread and formatted in MLA style or according to your teacher's instructions.