Summaries and Annotations

What is a summary?

- A summary is a condensed version of a longer passage.
- Just about anything can be summarized, but the main things we summarize are articles, books, and papers.
- The goal of summarizing is to find the main points and focus on them.

Why do we summarize?

- Sometimes we summarize for the sake of learning. It's easy to read through something without any comprehension, but forcing yourself to summarize the material is a helpful tool in ensuring you have understood what you have read.
- We summarize to share what we have learned. A five-minute presentation does not allow for an entire article to be read, and no one wants to listen to that anyway. A summary of the article or book relays the information and might pique the audience's interest and lead them to read the entire volume.

Steps to summarizing

1. Read the selection.
2. Determine how many sentences or paragraphs you want your summary to be.
3. Divide the length of the article by the number of sentences or paragraphs in your summary.
   a. If your selection is six pages, and you want a six-sentence summary, you know you need to summarize one page in one sentence, for example. Alternatively, a 24-page selection that you're condensing to three paragraphs should contain about eight pages of material in each paragraph.
   b. This is not going to be a set-in-stone number; it just gives you an idea of how much information you are going to need to put into your intended unit (sentence or paragraph).

4. In order to find where to divide your article, look for places where the text changes topic, direction, or action.
    a. In scientific articles or journals, subheadings are useful; the author has already told you where he or she is changing subject.
    b. In narratives, look for places the setting, dialogue, or character changes.
    c. Key words like "however" and "therefore" show transition from one thought to another.
    d. If possible, mark the reading selection into the number of passages you determined you would need in Step 3.
5. Read back through the first small section and highlight key words or phrases.
    a. Look for bold-face or italicized content. This is often the author's way of telling you which information he or she deems most important.
    b. The goal here is to eliminate minute details, so resist the urge to highlight entire paragraphs or even sentences if possible. Focus instead on the most important words that show what the entire section is about.

"A ==rainbow== is not located at a specific distance from the observer, but comes from an ==optical illusion== caused by any ==water droplets== viewed from a certain angle relative to a light source. Thus, a rainbow is not an object and can==not be physical==ly approached. Indeed, it is impossible for an observer to see a rainbow from water droplets at any ==angle== other than the customary one of 42 degrees from the direction ==opposite== the light source. Even if an observer sees another observer who seems "under" or "at the end of" a rainbow, the second observer will see a different rainbow—farther off—at the same angle as seen by the first observer."

In the above passage, the entire selection is, clearly, about rainbows. The key ideas are those of "optical illusions", "not physical", and the idea that the rainbow is seen from an "angle."

6. Take those key words and compose a full sentence from them. From the above passage, a summary statement, then, might be as follows: "Rainbows are not material, but optical illusions dependent on each observer's perspective to the light source and water droplets."
7. Use the title of the article to help you determine what the article is about.

Example

Passage:

"It's likely no surprise to dog owners, but growing research suggests that man's best friend often acts more human than canine. Dogs can read facial expressions, communicate jealousy, display empathy, and even watch TV, studies have shown. They've picked up these people-like traits during their evolution from wolves to domesticated pets, which occurred between 11,000 and 16,000 years ago. Here are a few of the latest studies showing the human side of our canine companions. Social eavesdropping—or people-watching—is central to human social interactions, since it allows us to figure out who's nice and who's mean. According to a study published in August in the journal *Animal Behaviour*, our dogs listen in too. In a new study, scientists tested 54 dogs that each watched their owners struggle to retrieve a roll of tape from a container. The dogs were divided into three groups: helper, non-helper, and control. In the helper group, the owner requested help from another person, who held the container. In the non-helper group, the owner asked for help from a person, who then turned their back without helping. In the control group, the additional person turned his or her back without being asked for help. In all experiments, a third, "neutral" person sat in the room. After the first round of experiments, the neutral person and the helper or non-helper both offered treats to the dog. In the non-helper group, canines most frequently favored the neutral person's treat, shunning the non-helper. However, in the helper group, the dogs did not favor either the helper or the neutral person over the other. Scientists have previously observed similar results in human infants and tufted capuchin monkeys. So are dogs taking sides by ignoring the people who are mean to their owners? Only future research will tell. " - National Geographic

Summary Example:

Scientists have begun to believe that dogs can pick up on more human traits than previously thought. Scientists believe that, like humans, dogs will show hostility towards a person who doesn't treat the dog's human with respect.

Why do we annotate?

- Often when we read, we tend to zone out and completely forget about the text all together.
- Annotating allows you to stay engaged with the text so you do not miss important pieces of information, thereby gaining a better understanding of the text.
- Annotating also allows you to engage in a 'conversation' with the author. You are able to ask questions, highlight important points, and even argue something the author said.

How do we annotate?

- The first step is to read through the text. Make sure that you read through it carefully the first time. Try to absorb what the author is really trying to say.
- Reread the text, this time picking out the important parts or things that interest you. Whenever you come across these things, highlight them or write your thoughts in the margins beside it.
- A good way to mark important pieces of information is to write stars by the phrase or word, write questions or arguments in the margins, highlight key words in the text, etc.
- Be sure to circle or underline any words that you are not familiar with so you can look them up.
- After that, go back through and pick out the main points or the thesis. These come in handy when you need to understand the point the author is trying to make.
- If you do not want to write in your book, use sticky notes or notebook paper.