HOW TO CREATE A READING SUMMARY

Reading summaries seem to flow from top (nutshell statement) to bottom (minor ideas and assessment), but in fact the best ones grow from the bottom up. Here’s a way to summarize any article or book.

Step 1. Indicate your Judgment & Assessment
After going through the reading, rate it on a scale from best (5) to worst (1). Your rating expresses your judgment of the value of the reading. Then present your assessment by a) listing one (or two, but not more than three) specific criteria or standards you used and b) indicating in a few words or a phrase how the article performed on each criterion (max. length, 1 line per criterion and about 7 words per line).

Step 2. List the Interesting Ideas
Start by listing some important terms, ideas, or pieces of key evidence the author uses. It’s essential to find terms or phrases the author used, invented, or employed.

Step 3. Find the Key Concepts
Sort the ideas into 1–3 groups of related ones, and then identify the key concept that brings each group together. Set these main ideas aside.

Step 4. Edit and define the Secondary Ideas
Review the ideas remaining from the list of interesting ideas in each group. Pare back or combine any that overlap to simplify and reduce the list to 2–3 of the best elements remaining in each group.

Step 5. Create the Secondary Definitions
Write a one-phrase definition or summary for each of the secondary ideas, no more than one line or about 7 words each. It’s okay to use a direct quotation (more than 2 words) from the reading, but cite the page like this: (p. 00).

Step 6. Construct the Key Definitions
Use the related ideas and terms from the secondary list to construct a definition for each key concept. The definition expresses the relationship you found when sorting in Step 3.

Step 7. Build a Nutshell Statement
Start with the Key Concepts and form them into a one-sentence summary of the main point or argument of the reading.

Step 8. Fit the result into a Summary Format
Reorder the above elements into the following top-down format: Citation, Nutshell Statement, Key Concepts, Secondary Ideas, Judgment & Assessment.

See the undergrad reading form, along with tips for Reading in the Social Sciences, here: Barnhurst Teaching: http://www.uic.edu/~kgbcomm/didact/