



Critical Strategies Part 2: Summarizing

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Last week I posted a tip sheet on *defining*, which is the first critical strategy listed by Rose and Kiniry (1998). Recall that to make sense of what we are reading and writing, we are unconsciously using mental operations as a major resource. To take advantage of the benefits of critical thinking and writing, we should be working with each of the six strategies (i.e., defining, summarizing, serializing, classifying, comparing, and analyzing) one at a time (Rose & Kiniry, 1998). This week's tip sheet includes the critical strategy of *summarizing*.

As you know, critical thinking, reading and writing at the scholarly level requires objectivity, organization, and at times a contribution of a personal opinion. Therefore, structure and readability is important (Rose & Kiniry, 1998). Summarizing is probably one of easiest and quickest ways to inform the reader of the main ideas of an original source before moving into the details of the article. For example, when we write a literature review we should be constantly, consistently and "briefly" informing the reader about the generalization of findings, implications and at times our reaction to whatever report we are reviewing. This rule also applies to various other genres and across the curriculum (Rose & Kiniry, 1998). Essentially, you are making decisions about what to include or not and why. "Summaries are condensed presentations of material appearing elsewhere in fuller forms" (p. 81), such as abstracts, introductions, conclusions, college lectures, in exams, and so on (Rose & Kiniry, 1998). We even utilize this strategy often in single sentence summaries such as in this example:

Jones and Bowman (2014), who did a study on the four generations of workers using an American sample of employees in the manufacturing industry, found a significant difference between the need for power and security for the Millennial generation.

When we construct summaries, we are using our ability to recognize, connect and represent generalizations in an abstract form (Rose & Kiniry, 1998). We are using a structure that can expand or contract via a phrasing strategy to keep the entries parallel and/or equal.

Tips & Tricks:

These authors suggested we try looking for connections between what is general, what is abstract and the specific points that either support or complicate the topic. Look for patterns, categories, relationships, or how the article is organized (Rose & Kiniry, 1998). Then map out the main points and identify the way they are balanced. Use outlines when the material is more complex, but don't rely on outlines as a means to the end. Rose and Kiniry warned that when we use outlines to summarize, they

merely help us place or frame the main emphasis in a coherent manner. An effective summary, according to Rose and Kiniry, does not distort the original works!

Ask Yourself (Rose & Kiniry, 1998):

1. What is the main focus of the article?
2. What should be included, excluded, combined, and/or connected?
3. What criteria am I using to make these decisions?
4. How much space do I have for the summary?
5. Is the final summary a serious distortion of the original? Are there major and important omissions?
6. Does the first sentence or two acknowledge the broad effects of the topic or issue?
7. How will my research confirm or challenge the article (for lit reviews chapters)?
8. What does the article fail to address? Is it too simple or unrealistic?

In conclusion, for this to be a great resource for you as a writer, put the concept of summarizing to work as you write your dissertation chapters and test the power and usefulness in an active and critical way. Rose and Kiniry argued that these and other summarizing strategies are a way to engage our critical thinking, our interpretive intelligence and our judgment. Summarizing works in coordination with the other five strategies. Next week, watch for a mini-lesson on *serializing*.

References

Rose, M., & Kiniry, M. (1998). *Critical strategies for academic thinking and writing* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Bedford Books.

Summarize. (n.d.). Masters Program [Graphic image]. Retrieved from <http://mastersprogramnew.blogspot.com/2013/09/masters-program-public-history.html>