Riverside Community College
Directed Learning Activity
Reading Strategy
Summary Writing

1. Read the explanation of summary writing as a reading strategy.

2. After you read, answer the following questions:

1. What is a summary?

2. How long should a summary be?

3. Why should you evaluate your purpose before writing a summary?

4. How does the pattern of organization help in writing a summary?

5. What is the format for a summary?

1. Using the guidelines outlined in this activity, summarize "Effects of the Automobile" written by James M. Henslin from the college textbook, Sociology: A Down-to-Earth Approach (Allyn and Bacon).

2. Ask an instructor or paraprofessional for the answers that accompany this activity. Check your answers to the questions above. Then, compare your summary to the sample provided with this packet.

3. Summarize a reading assignment for one of your classes. Review your work with an instructor or paraprofessional in the Reading Lab.
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Reading Strategy-Summary Writing

A summary is the reduction of a large amount of information to its most important points. To write a summary, the reader is required to read carefully and to identify the author’s main ideas of a text. A well-written summary is an effective way to improve comprehension since the reader is required to interact with the material on a deeper level. Summary writing can also be used to create a study guide in preparation for a test.

Characteristics of Summaries:
• Summaries identify the author and title of the original text.
• Summaries demonstrate understanding of the author’s main ideas.
• Summaries are much shorter than the original text, since they omit most minor details.
• Summaries do not include your opinions or interpretations.
• Summaries are written in your own words unless you are quoting the author or writing definitions from a textbook.

Guidelines to Writing Summaries:
• **Length**: A summary consists of the main idea and major supporting details. As a general guide, each paragraph can be reduced to 1-2 sentences.
  *To summarize a paragraph, locate the topic sentence and major details.
  *To summarize an essay, locate the thesis statement and topic sentences.
  *To summarize a textbook chapter, use the headers, sub-headers, and words in bold to signal important ideas.

• **Purpose**: The length of a summary will depend on your purpose. If you are writing a summary to study for a test, your summary will be more detailed and include textbook examples. If you are summarizing an article for an English class to help you remember what you read, your summary will briefly highlight the main points.

• **Patterns of Organization**: Use the same organizational structure of the original text. If your textbook is listing a number of theories, then your summary will also be a list. If you’re reading a novel, your summary will narrate a series of events.

• **Plan it out**: You may find it helpful to write a brief outline or draw a map before writing the summary. Organize the main idea and major details. Avoid including insignificant minor details.

• **Format**: Write the summary in complete sentences in paragraph format. Your first sentence should state the author, title, and main idea of the entire text. Then, list the supporting details using transitions to signal your major points.
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Reading Strategy-Summary Writing

“Effects of the Automobile” by James M. Henslin

Adapted from Sociology: A Down-to-Earth Approach (Allyn and Bacon)

If we try to pick the single item that has had the greatest impact of social life in the twentieth century, among the many candidates the automobile stands out. Let us look at some of the ways in which it changed U.S. society.

The automobile gradually pushed aside the old technology, a replacement that began in earnest when Henry Ford began to mass produce the Model T in 1908. People immediately found automobiles attractive. They considered them cleaner, safer, more reliable, and more economical than horses. Cars also offered the appealing prospect of lower taxes, for no longer would the public have to pay to clean up the tons of horse manure that accumulated in the city streets each day. Humorous as it sounds now, it was even thought that automobiles would eliminate the cities’ parking problems, for an automobile took up only half as much space as a horse and buggy.

The automobile also replaced a second technology. The United States had developed a vast system of urban transit, with electric streetcar lines radiating outward from the center of our cities. As the automobile became affordable and more dependable, Americans demonstrated a clear preference for the greater convenience of private transportation. Instead of walking to a streetcar and then having to wait in the cold and rain, people were able to travel directly from home on their own schedule.

The decline in the use of streetcars actually changed the shape of U.S. cities. Before the automobile, U.S. cities were web-shaped, for residences and businesses were located along the streetcar lines. When freed by automobiles from having to live so close to the tracks, people filled the area between the “webs.”

The automobile also stimulated mass suburbanization. Already in the 1920s U.S. residents had begun to leave the city, for they found that they could commute to work in the city from outlying areas where they benefited from more room and few taxes. Their departure significantly reduced the cities’ tax base, thus contributing to many of the problems that U.S. cities experience today.

The automobile had a profound impact on farm life and villages. Prior to the 1920s, most farmers were isolated from the city. Because using horses for a trip to town was slow and cumbersome, they made such trips infrequently. By the 1920s, however, the popularity and low price of the Model T made the “Saturday trip to town” a standard event. There, farmers would market products, shop, and visit with friends. As a consequence, farm life was altered; for example, mail-order catalogues stopped being the primary source of shopping, and access to better medical care and education improved. Farmers were also able to travel to bigger towns,
where they found a greater variety of goods. As farmers began to use the nearby villages only for immediate needs, these flourishing centers of social and commercial life dried up.

The automobile’s effects on commercial architecture are clear—from the huge parking lots that decorate malls like necklaces to the drive-up windows of banks and restaurants. But the automobile also fundamentally altered the architecture of U.S. homes. Before the car, each home had a stable in the back where the family kept its buggy and horses. The stable was the logical place to shelter the family’s car, and it required no change in architecture. The change occurred in three steps. First, new homes were built with a detached garage located like the stable, at the back of the home. Second, as the automobile became a more essential part of the U.S. family, the garage was incorporated into the home by moving it from the backyard to the side of the house, and connecting it by a breezeway. In the final step the breezeway was removed, and the garage integrated into the home so that Americans could enter automobiles without even going outside.

By the 1920s, the automobile was used extensively for dating. This removed children from the watchful eye of parents and undermined parental authority. The police began to receive complaints about “night riders” who parked their cars along country lanes, “doused their lights, and indulged in orgies.” Automobiles became so popular for courtship that by the 1960s about 40 percent of marriage proposals took place in them.

In 1925 Jewett introduced cars with a foldout bed, as did Nash in 1937. The Nash version became known as “the young man’s model.” Since the 1970s mobile lovemaking has declined, partly because urban sprawl (itself due to the automobile) left fewer safe trysting spots, and partly because changed sexual norms made beds more accessible.

The automobile may also lie at the heart of the changed role of women in U.S. society. Because automobiles required skill rather than strength, women were able to drive as well as men. This new mobility freed women physically from the narrow confines of the home. As James Flink, [a historian] observed, the automobile changed women “from producers of food and clothing into consumers of national-brand canned goods, prepared foods, and ready-made clothes. The automobile permitted shopping at self-serve supermarkets outside the neighborhood and in combination with the electric refrigerator made buying food a weekly rather than a daily activity.” When women began to do the shopping, they gained greater control over the family budget, and as their horizons extended beyond the confines of the home, they also gained different views of life.

With changes this extensive, it would not be inaccurate to say that the automobile also shifted basic values and changed the way we look at life. No longer isolated, women, teenagers, and farmers began to see the world differently. So did husbands and wives, whose marital relationship had also been altered. The automobile even transformed views of courtship, sexuality, and gender relations.

No one attributes such fundamental changes solely to the automobile, of course, for many historical events, as well as other technological changes, occurred during this same period, each making its own contribution to social change. Even this brief overview of social effects of the automobile, however, illustrates that technology is not merely an isolated tool but exerts a profound influence on social life.