

English 110

Feedback: Summary assignments

Below are collected notes and remarks in response to your first round of summary writing assignments handed back to you this week. Please read the notes below and apply the rules you see there to your work. **All future formal out-of-class writing work (which includes your typed summaries, thesis paragraphs and essay drafts and finals) must be adequately proofread to eliminate these error patterns, or the work will not receive credit, so please read and study these notes carefully.**

- **Include an “about statement” in your summary work** that sums up, in a single sentence, what the work is essentially *really* about, i.e. what message it seems to be trying to deliver. Provide a succinct statement that delivers the fundamental truth of the work to your reader.
- Please **know your sources and types of work** before you write about them: if it’s a book of stories, don’t call it a novel; if they’re stories, don’t call them chapters or essays. Stories and novels are both fiction (which means *imagined*), but one is short and the other is long, and they’re not the same thing – please don’t confuse them in your work. Same is true for story vs. chapter, or story vs. essay: a chapter is a numbered section of a longer work – it’s not a self-contained story; and an essay is non-fiction writing, not fiction – the two cannot be used interchangeably, because they are different kinds of writing.
- Remember that when you summarize something like a story or poem or novel, you *also* must follow this other very important rule of summary writing: **Do not simply summarize the plot** (what happens in a story) – Summaries should do much more than that. You must also describe major themes in the work, as well as the tone(s) and setting(s) (time and place) of the narrative, introduce the characters and the point of view the story is told from, and explain how the author uses certain literary devices like image and symbol and metaphor or similar. Give us the complete picture of the piece of writing – don’t just tell us what happens in the story.
- Remember that when you summarize something like a story or poem or novel, you must follow this very important rule of summary writing: **Do not quote the source text in your summary work** - summary writing, by definition, is your own words, not those of the source text.
- **Capitalize proper nouns and the adjectival phrases that are derived from them.** So, terms like New Criticism, New Critics, New Critical, as well as Reader Response need always to be capitalized so that we’ll know that you’re referring to those specific bodies of literary theory.
- **Do not confuse italics with quotations marks** when you reference titles in your work. Please review the **Proofreading Notes** sheet on the Resources page on our website – there you will find a clear explanation of when to use quotation marks and when to use italics in your work.
- Use **present tense verbs** to discuss the reading selection you’ve chosen to write about, not past tense verbs.
- **Periods and commas go inside quotation marks**, not outside (except when you put a parenthetical author/page citation after the quote, and then the period does go outside the quotation marks and the parentheses, after everything, while commas are dropped entirely.) Please review the **Quotation Integration** sheet on the Resources page on our website – there you will see clear examples of where to put periods and commas in your work.
- **Semicolons are not commas**, and they are not colons. Semicolons do only one of two things: they join together two independent and grammatically complete sentence into one new compound sentence, or the separate complex items in a list. Please review semicolon usage rules on the **Proofreading Notes** sheet on the Resources page on our website – there you will find a clear explanation of when and how to use them in your work.
- **Eliminate comma spliced sentences in your work.** A comma is not a period: it is not designed to join complete sentences together on its own. When you do use a comma to join together two otherwise correct and independent sentences it’s called a **comma splice**, and it’s wrong. To do that kind of sentence combination work, you need to either add an appropriate conjunction word after the comma, or replace the comma with a period and a capital letter to mark the beginning of a new sentence.
- **Do not use a comma after a complete sentence that is being used to introduce a quote.** Use a colon (:) instead. This is called a “lead-in comma splice.” Below is an example of this kind of common comma splice error. The comma just before the quote needs to be replaced with a colon (:).

In succession the images of these wounded soldiers continually portray a frozen piece of raw history, “No one will display those men crushed beyond repair; no one will display their loose parts; no one will display them crawling from the walls. Future generations will miss the crucial sight of ourselves as rammed earth” (3).