

CIP's Guide to Writing a Summary

Writing a summary

A summary note is a brief, clear, and objective description of a publication. The purpose of a summary on bibliographic records created as part of the Cataloging in Publication program is to provide additional information to help readers identify books they want to read. Summaries also play a uniquely important role when CIP catalog records appear in online catalogs of libraries and book sellers as they enable the user to search the book by the key words that appear in the summary.

A good summary is non-critical ("Recounts the life and times of Benjamin Franklin as related through personal narratives, journal entries, and other primary source materials") and avoids personal opinion and advertising hype ("Another superlative and important novel by today's greatest living American author"). A good summary conveys the scope of the book, it reflects content, and it avoids any judgmental statements.

Characteristics of a good summary:

- **Concise:** The summary should be brief. A length of no more than fifty (50) words is recommended, especially in view of the printing of CIP data in the published book; often one sentence or phrase is sufficient.
- **Objective:** The summary should present an unbiased point-of-view and not represent the opinion of the publisher or author. The summary is neither a review nor a description of the publisher's or author's intent.
- **Informative:** Specific terms, names of people, geographical areas, and time periods should be used in summaries as appropriate.
- **Timeless:** A summary may be used for years after it is written. Avoid using words and phrases that indicate the currency of a work, e.g., latest, state-of-the-art, newest, most recent, and so on.
- **Language:** Use Standard English; avoid using slang, colloquial terms, or jargon; do not use profane or obscene language. Spell out acronyms and initialisms. Use standard and/or preferred spellings of words. Avoid abbreviations and shortened forms of words – e.g., biographies, not bios. Use words that are simple and direct. Avoid obscure words, words that have more than one meaning, redundancies, and clichés.
- **Style:** Use the active voice, present tense, and third person. Do not use subjective words or phrases that may be promotional or judgmental – e.g., "best", "most creative", "remarkable", etc. Avoid overlong and complex sentences, choppy sentences, and wordiness. Spell out whole numbers from one to ninety-nine and those above ninety-nine are given as figures. If three or more words or phrases are used in a series, separate the words or phrases with commas. Follow the [Chicago Manual of Style](#) when creating summaries.
- **Grammar, capitalization, and punctuation:** Correct English grammar should be used in all summaries. Subject and verbs must agree. Avoid misplaced modifiers and dangling participles. The first word of each sentence or phrase should be capitalized, as should all proper nouns. Use proper and adequate punctuation.

Examples of acceptable summaries:

A basic introduction to how our bodies perceive taste and smell, exploring such topics as the taste buds, the detection of different tastes, the structure of the nose, and artificial tastes and smells.

Discusses the nature and causes of acid rain, its harmful effects, and possible ways to prevent it.

Looks at important writings and moments in American history during the Spanish American War, annexation of the Philippines and other territories, and the Industrial Revolution.

A resource on the treatment of headaches, including: treatment options for migraines, cluster headaches, and tension headaches, information and quick-reference guides on over-the-counter and prescription medications, alternative treatments, relaxation techniques, biofeedback, and an index of headache clinics and organizations.

Presents selections from sources such as memoirs, letters, and newspaper accounts, relating to the nineteenth century expansion of America westward to the Pacific Ocean by Lewis and Clark, Zebulon Pike, and many others.

Examines the evolution of stone architecture in the Middle Ages and the techniques of building castles and cathedrals.

Tracks the history of wine-making in the United States.

Describes the 1961 flight of Soviet astronaut Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space, as well as the scientific background to that flight and space exploration since then.

An introduction to the physical characteristics, behavior, habitat, and life cycle of raccoons.

Presents information on the history and development of the English language. Features more than 13,000 words traced to their origins in Proto-Indo-European, the prehistoric ancestor of English. Includes an essay on the Proto-Indo-European culture and a dictionary of more than 1,300 reconstructed roots as well as related language and culture notes.

Acceptable and unacceptable examples compared:

Unacceptable

Compelling narrative laced with first-person accounts from both American and Japanese survivors combines with dramatic archival images and a brief overview to paint a vivid portrait of what it was like to have witnessed, participated in, and lived through the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor that infamous morning of December 7, 1941. Historical photos set the scene. This landmark volume will provide young readers with valuable insights into both the Japanese and American points of view and demonstrate why people on both sides feel the need to remember Pearl Harbor.

Acceptable

Collection of stories told by American and Japanese survivors of the Dec. 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, describing their experiences.

Unacceptable

Serve up a heaping lesson of history with delicious recipes from our nation's past-- from the pilgrims' first feast to today's high-tech, low-fat fare-- Who knew history could be so delicious? In *The U.S. History Cookbook*, you'll discover how Americans have lived and dined over the centuries. This scrumptious survey of periods and events in U.S. history mixes together a delectable batter of food time lines, kid-friendly recipes, and fun food facts throughout each chapter, including such fascinating tidbits as: Sunday was baked bean day in many colonial family homes; pioneers took advantage of the rough trails to churn milk into butter; the Girl Scouts first started selling cookies in the 1930s to save money for summer camp; and so much more!

Acceptable

Presents a variety of American recipes along with information on the people and events from the history of the United States.

Unacceptable

Wind, rain, soft drifting snowflakes and burning sunshine: all kids wonder what makes the weather what it is. How can we predict whether there will be blue skies or rain tomorrow? Where do clouds come from? Why do we have thunder and lightning? Answer all these questions and more with entertaining experiments geared to youngsters in the second and third grades.

Acceptable

Introduces information on weather through a variety of weather-related experiments. Intended for second and third grade students.

Unacceptable

The definitive one-volume history of the most fascinating franchise in baseball. For a century now, the Boston Red Sox have meant many different things to many different people, eliciting elation, frustration, nostalgia, nausea, confidence, anger, bewilderment, love, and loss, often all at once. But no matter the ups and downs, in their long, storied history the Red Sox have always managed to provide us with one thing that is certain -- they are the most interesting team ever to have taken the field.

Acceptable

Through interviews and photographs, presents information on many Boston Red Sox players, managers, fans, and events, and traces the history of the team from its beginning in 1901 to the end of the twentieth century.

CIP Guidelines for Summaries

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