**How to Summarize**

*Summarizing* is a critical study skill and fortunately one that is easily learned. It involves condensing an original piece of writing so that it contains only the most important information. The *thesis* should be very clearly indicated, but *examples* are in most cases inappropriate.

If your instructor does not tell you how long your summary should be, try to make it about one-fifth to one-quarter the length of the original.

Remember that you need to put everything in your own words and sentence structure. If you use even one or two distinctive words of the original, you must place quotation marks around them. Plagiarism is unacceptable at any time, and this is especially true while summarizing. The proper use of quotation marks, and proper acknowledgement of other people's words and ideas, is often difficult for the freshman student to keep in mind, but its importance cannot be overemphasized.

Following the steps outlined below will help you write an acceptable summary:

1. Read the original *carefully*. This may mean that you must read it two, three or even four times in order to understand it *completely* and *accurately*.
2. Next, group the original writing into related paragraphs or sections.
3. Then write a *one* or *two* sentence summary for each group of related paragraphs. These sentences should reflect the *main idea* of each section accurately.
4. Write *one sentence* which gives the main idea or *thesis* of the entire writing. Typically, you should look carefully at the first and last paragraphs of the original to find the thesis.
5. In writing the first draft of the summary, be sure to be reader-friendly and start with a *summary introduction*, which includes the *name* of the article or book, the *author* and if appropriate the date and name of the *journal, magazine or newspaper* in which the article appeared. Include in your summary introduction your statement of the overall thesis of the original. Follow this with the sentence you wrote for each group of related paragraphs, keeping them in the order of the original.
6. In your final draft, eliminate repetitions and generally make your summary coherent. This means that you may need to use appropriate *transitional words* or phrases to show the connection of the ideas of the original. Your final product must read smoothly and reflect the information in the original accurately.

Remember that if your instructor needs to read the *original* in order to understand your *summary*, you have failed in your task and should try again.

**Practice:** Write a summary of “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle.” Remember to include enough information so the instructor can see that you understand the material, and can identify the key plot points while leaving out unnecessary details.