Summarizing an Essay

Summarizing an essay is very much like summarizing a paragraph. The difference, of course, is that an essay is longer so your summary will be longer. When summarizing an essay, however, you are still finding and writing down the major ideas. To find the major ideas, it is helpful to understand the organization of an essay.

Generally, an essay has three parts:

**Introduction:** An introduction states the subject of an essay and prepares the reader for a discussion of that subject. Most often, this subject is stated in a thesis statement. A thesis statement is the controlling idea of the entire essay. (A thesis statement of an essay is like the main idea of a paragraph.)

**Body:** The body is made up of paragraphs that back up the thesis statement. These paragraphs usually contain facts and examples that help the reader understand the thesis more clearly. Usually these paragraphs begin with a topic sentence that contains the main ideas of the whole paragraph. These main ideas relate to the thesis statement and help make the thesis statement clearer.

**Conclusion:** A conclusion is one or two paragraphs at the end of the essay. The conclusion helps show the reader the significance of the discussion of the essay.

Here are four steps to follow when summarizing an essay:

1. **Preview and read:** Preview and read the essay closely. You will find that you need to read the essay more than one time, perhaps even four or five times.

2. **Make a list or outline:** Determine the thesis and the main ideas that support the thesis. Make a list or outline of these ideas. Be sure to use your own words.

3. **Write a summary:** Using your list, write a summary of the essay. Limit your summary to one paragraph. (As a general rule, a summary should not be longer than ¼ the length of the essay.) Here are some additional guidelines to following when writing the summary:
   a. In the first sentence of your summary, state the title, author, and thesis of the essay. The thesis can be stated in the second sentence rather than the first sentence if you wish.
   b. In the rest of the summary, state the main ideas that back up the thesis. Also include any information that is needed to explain the main idea. State these ideas in the same order as they are given in the essay.
   c. A summary must be written in your own words. If you do use the author’s exact words in any part of the summary, you must put those words in quotation marks.

*(Taken from WAR, Unit 5)*
Can a Freeze Halt the Nuclear Arms Race?

Imagine a world of peace, a world in which there was utter trust between the Soviet Union and the United States. It sounds almost too good to be true. The question is, could an arms freeze of Soviet and American nuclear weaponry in Europe achieve this end? The simplicity of the proposal is what makes it impossible to ever become a reality. There are several problems connected with a sudden suspension of nuclear weapons that cannot be overlooked.

Can we trust the Soviets to completely freeze their own weapons? The Soviet Union is such a large country there is no way the Americans can ever verify a total freeze. In addition to this, there is little indication the Soviets would attempt such a halt. To implement an arms freeze would be to shut down their most important and productive industry. Understandably, they do not wish to do this.

At this point, the Soviets have far more nuclear weapons than the Americans. A freeze such as has been proposed is based on a parity of weaponry. The implications of a freeze right now are almost frightening. We are in such a position of weakness that if the freeze took place now, the Soviets would not hesitate to exercise their advantage over us. A question of trusting the Soviets comes into this problem, also, for they have a long history of aggression that we could not control if our weaponry were frozen.

With such a weakness in American arms, the security of the United States would be in jeopardy. Since the Soviets are so aggressive and we could never be sure if they had indeed frozen all their weapons, the American people would live in constant fear of Soviet desire to “beat down” the Western countries. How can the United States expect to defend itself against a superior, more aggressive force without the security of equal weaponry?

A freeze of all nuclear weapons, therefore, is not a good idea. The prospect of peace is a good idea, but peace that is achieved through a combined effort is far more desirable than a sudden tentative “peace” in which one country is obviously the underdog and vulnerable to anything the stronger country desires. Perhaps the idea of an arms freeze is ahead of its time. It certainly will not work now: it is too simple.

A simple solution will not resolve a complex situation. There are more factors involved with the future of the world we share with one another. With a parity of arms between the Soviets and the Americans, then maybe the freeze can begin to work. But then arises the problem of monitoring each country to verify the freeze. We cannot trust them, and they cannot trust us. As it stands now, however, we would be placed in a position of weakness that could mostly likely lead to our destruction. We would not be able to defend ourselves adequately. The idea of a freeze then, is idealistic and unrealistic. In the right time and place, it may work. But now we cannot close our eyes to the obstacles that prevent it from running a true course. The race for peace or nuclear superiority rushes on…

(Taken from The Student Outlook)
Outline

Thesis: There are several reasons why it would be impossible to suddenly stop the nuclear weapons build-up in the United States and the Soviet Union.

(Main supporting idea #1) The United States cannot trust the Soviet Union to stop building weapons.

(evidence)

--The U.S. would not really know if the Soviet Union stopped building weapons

--The Soviet Union would not want to stop their important defense industry

(Main supporting idea #2) The U.S. is behind the Soviet Union in weaponry.

(evidence)

--The Soviet Union would use its military strength against the U.S.

--The Soviet Union is an aggressive country and could not be controlled.

(Main supporting idea #3) Because of the Soviet Union’s superior weapon strength, the security of the U.S. would be threatened.

(evidence)

--The U.S. would always be afraid of the Soviet Union.

--The U.S. would not be able to defend itself.

Summary

(Notice that the thesis and the main supporting ideas are included in the summary. The evidence that backs up the main supporting ideas has not been included in the summary. The writer, in this case, did not feel that it was necessary to include the evidence in the summary.)

In her essay “Can a Freeze Halt the Nuclear Arms Race?” Elizabeth Knoll discusses several reasons why it would be impossible to suddenly stop the nuclear weapon build-up in the United States and the Soviet Union. One reason that a sudden nuclear freeze is impossible is that the United States cannot trust the Soviet Union to stop building weapons. Also, stopping the arms build-up would be unrealistic, for we are behind the Soviet Union in weaponry. The security of our country would be threatened because of the Soviet Union’s superior nuclear weapon strength. The author Elizabeth Knoll, feels that some day a freeze might work, but right now there are too many serious obstacles.