

“The Tragedy of the Commons” In-class Summary

“The Tragedy of the Commons” is a challenging, college-level essay that offers excellent reading practice for the kinds of assignments you may encounter when you transfer. In attacking such difficult readings, you will have to employ strategies that you may not have needed for *Amsterdam*. Writing a paragraph-by-paragraph summary—or in this case, a section-by-section summary—can help you use such strategies and verify your understanding of the work.

To prepare for this assignment, carefully read and study pp. 94-99 in *Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing*. Our text here gives a good example of the kind of summary I’m looking for. It is not a formal summary; instead, it is an informal explication that moves through the reading, explaining the strategies and main ideas in each section and showing the writer’s grasp of the ideas in the text. I want you to achieve something very much like this for “The Tragedy of the Commons,” except that you will want to focus on sections rather than individual paragraphs as an organizational scheme. Don’t worry about standard essay format or a thesis.

Do, however, think about how you will clarify your focus and organization. It’s a good idea to start with a short discussion of the title and introductory paragraphs and then use the subtitles to identify each section that you are talking about, much the way the *Critical Thinking* example uses paragraph numbers. I suggest that you maintain a fairly neutral stance, explaining what Hardin is doing and saying in each section—you won’t have enough time to critique each section and still get through the entire essay. Your summary might range from just a few sentences to a full paragraph for each section. Be careful not to get bogged down in too much detail—don’t try to summarize every single paragraph.

If you include Hardin’s words and phrases, be sure to enclose them in quotation marks, but don’t worry about parenthetical citations for this summary. Don’t quote extensively, though. Most of the writing should be in your own words.

You will be writing your summary/explication in class, in ink, on paper I will provide. I encourage you to prepare thoroughly, by reading and re-reading the essay, answering the discussion questions, participating in class discussions, and annotating your reader. You will **not** bring a draft or an outline to class, but you may, of course, bring your reader and the discussion questions. Leave time to read over and edit what you have written, but don’t try to copy over a whole draft.