

Analysis vs. Summary

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Summary and analysis are aspects of discussing an outside work in your writing, and function as complements to each other. Summary outlines the main elements of a text (who, what, where, when, why, and/or how) while analysis examines these elements to look for meaning. It is important to know the difference so your reader understands the subject and also knows your thoughts on the matter.

Ordinarily, you should strive for **10% summary and 90% analysis** in expository writing (i.e., writing that is used to investigate, evaluate, and argue a stance on a given subject). For genre specific writing, like lab reports, paper requirements will dictate when to use summary and when to use analysis.

Summary

Summary refers to the process of condensing someone else's work, specifically the main ideas, in your own words and doing justice to the author's original intentions. **It answers the questions of *who, what, where, when, why, and/or how* in that particular work.**

For example, here is a summary of a popular fairy tale.

- Ex: "Little Red Riding Hood" is a fairytale about a young red-cloaked girl who goes to visit her grandmother one day and is tricked by a hungry wolf disguised as her grandmother who she meets in the woods.
 - *Who*: A girl, a grandmother, and a wolf
 - *What*: A visit to grandmother's house goes wrong
 - *Where*: The woods
 - *When*: One day (also known as "Once upon a time")
 - *Why*: The wolf tricked her
 - *How*: Disguised himself as her grandmother

Tips for Summarizing

- Your summary should only be long enough to encompass the main idea(s) and any major supporting evidence. (In our example, we summarized an entire story in one sentence. It is entirely reasonable to expect one paragraph to summarize a 25-page paper, for instance).
- Try annotating the source to better understand the material. This process of taking notes on the page of whatever text you are reading can be accomplished by underlining or highlighting the main idea/thesis, supporting evidence, important figures/statistics, and special vocabulary.
- Outlining key words may also be helpful in determining the main ideas. Highlight 5-10 words that convey the main idea per paragraph, and then use those keywords as you begin to write your summary.
- Be sure to use attributive tags to show that you are summarizing someone else's work and ideas (i.e., "According to Smith"; see WSTS handout Quotations and Credible Sources)
- Take all the information you have gathered to formulate the thesis and supporting evidence into 1-2 sentences each, thereby forming a cohesive paragraph.
- You may use quotations sparingly to provide the original flavor of the text. Check with your instructor because some prefer paraphrase rather than quotes, but be sure to cite regardless.
- Make sure to check for repetition—delete sections that say the same thing.
- Remember that summary is NOT your opinion but instead remains objective and neutral, only stating the author's original points.
- Remember to attribute the summary to the original work in the form of a citation!

Analysis

Analysis, in contrast, features original thought from you, the writer. It examines the deeper meaning of the summarized content. This examination includes—but is not limited to—the work’s purpose, theme, and figurative language (more common in humanities disciplines), as well as patterns, pros and cons, and cause/effect relationships (more common in STEM fields). **Analysis answers the deeper questions *how* and/or *why* the theme or patterns in the text are important and/or relevant.**

For example, here is an analysis of the theme of “Little Red Riding Hood.”

- Red Riding Hood’s actions in “Little Red Riding Hood” imply that giving into temptation and straying from a moral code leads to punishment not just for the sinner (Red Riding Hood is eaten by the wolf), but also for those surrounding them (Red Riding Hood’s grandmother is also devoured). This punishment reinforces Christian moral codes present in medieval Germany, and also stresses the value of obedience to its audience.
 - *How is the theme communicated:* Through Red Riding Hood’s actions
 - *Why is the theme communicated:* To reinforce religious beliefs and stress the value of obedience

Preparing to Write an Analysis

Sometimes, it can be tempting to simply summarize a work rather than analyzing it, especially if the work in question is difficult to understand. If beginning your analysis is intimidating, start by reading and rereading your assignment sheet. Then ask yourself questions like these:

- What is my argument?
 - What is the purpose of the source?
 - What evidence in the work supports and/or contradicts that argument?
- How does the author construct meaning in the work?
 - What assumptions does the author make about the subject or audience, and why are such assumptions significant?
 - What types of rhetorical devices does s/he use? (e.g., logos, pathos, ethos, symbolism, metaphor, etc.)
 - How do these devices relate to the theme?
- What sources does the author use?
 - Do any other sources make a similar (or opposing) claim, reach a similar (or opposing) conclusion, or offer similar (or opposing) evidence?
 - What are the aims of the source, how worthwhile are they, and how are they achieved?
 - What do these sources tell you about the author’s stance and credibility?

Brainstorming can also be helpful when constructing the analysis of your paper. For more on this topic, check out the WSTS handout [Brainstorming, Outlining, and Organizing Your Paper](#).

After finishing your rough draft, read through it and ask yourself these questions (or have a friend read it and ask them these questions) to identify your analysis:

- What is my point?
- What am I arguing in this paper?

If the answer is “I don’t know,” then you need more analysis.

* For more information on writing analyses, see the WSTS handout [Rhetorical Analysis](#).

Works Consulted:

UNC-Chapel Hill Writing Center (<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/summary-using-it-wisely/>); University of West Georgia Writing Center (<https://www.westga.edu/academics/coah/writing/handouts-and-resources.php>); *Writing Matters: A Handbook for Writing and Research* (Howard); *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing*, 5th ed. (Ramage, Bean, and Johnson)