

Summary vs. Analysis

In the past, a professor may have given you a writing assignment and told you that she wanted you to “analyze the text and not just summarize it.” Both analysis and summary seem similar at first, so it can be difficult to know the difference.

Summary

Summary is essentially a list of various things without any sort of opinion or extra information from the writer. For example, if you were writing about *Romeo and Juliet*, you might summarize it by saying,

Romeo and Juliet’s families are feuding. Romeo and Juliet meet and fall in love. The two get married and make a plan to run away together. Juliet drinks a potion to fake her death so that the two of them can escape their families. Romeo sees Juliet’s sleeping body and assumes she is dead. He then kills himself. Juliet wakes up to find Romeo dead, and then proceeds to kill herself because of that.

Summaries like this are helpful for understanding basic plot elements, but they don’t give your professor a chance to see what you know. They also don’t leave any room to point back to your overall argument. This is where analysis comes in.

Analysis

Analysis differs from summary in that analysis is a closer look at a particular piece of a source that points to a thesis. For example, if your thesis is that Shakespeare is arguing that the power of love is the most important thing in the play, you might say something like this:

Romeo sees Juliet’s sleeping body and assumes she is dead. He then kills himself. This suggests that Romeo cannot or will not live without the love of Juliet. Juliet then wakes up to find Romeo dead and then proceeds to kill herself because she cannot handle his death. This suggests that Romeo and Juliet value each other over their own lives, meaning that the love is the most important thing to both of them. Their deaths are the reason their families stop fighting, which suggests that love is a powerful force in the play.

An analysis like this allows the professor to clearly see what you think about the source, and it allows you to use the text as evidence for your own argument. You can even use summaries as a starting point, like we did above, but it is important to go into more detail and connect what you’re talking about back to your thesis.

Questions to help you start an analysis

Good questions to ask when writing an analysis include: Why is this piece important? Does this evidence relate to my overall argument? How so? How would I explain this to someone else?

If a summary is a list of things, an analysis is an attempt to explain those things to someone else. When you analyze something, you try to make sense out of it. An analysis makes sense of and explains your evidence to your audience.

Contact

Want to analyze and improve your analysis skills? Come work with a tutor at the Writing Center! Drop by or use the information below to contact us and set up an appointment.

(972) 883-6736 WritingCenter@UTDallas.edu
www.UTDallas.edu/StudentSuccess/Writing