

Summary vs. Analysis

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.

SUMMARY is recapitulation, review, retelling a story or scene without original thoughts or interpretations. Summary is not the goal of expository essays. It is usually easier than analysis because it requires less thought. Assume that the reader of your essay knows the story and needs just the slightest reminder.

ANALYSIS is examination, evaluation, dissection, interpretation, original opinion, reading between the lines, connecting to other knowledge, etc. It is the goal of most expository essays. The analyzer starts with a quotation or question and uses it to show his/her understating and interpretation. **Analysis answers the deeper questions how and/or why the theme or patterns in the text are important and/or relevant.**

***Strive for 90% interpretation and 10% summary in your expository writing*.**

Here is an example of summary (to be avoided) and analysis (to be practiced):

Quotation: As Gatsby is driving Nick to lunch, he notices a change in his manner; “We hadn’t reached West Egg Village before Gatsby began leaving his elegant sentences unfinished and slapping himself indecisively on the knee of his caramel-colored suit. ‘Look here, old sport,’ he broke out surprisingly. What’s your opinion of me anyhow?”(69).

Summary: Nick is riding with Gatsby to lunch. He notices that Gatsby is speaking differently, leaving his sentences unfinished. Gatsby asks Nick what he thinks of him.

(Notice that there is no opinion or interpretation in this statement. It adds nothing to our understanding of the passage.)

Analysis: In this scene, we see a break in Gatsby's affected calm. Nick had noticed previously that he "pick[ed] his words with care"(53); now he leaves sentences unfinished. His agitation is seen also in his physical movements, as he "slap[s] himself indecisively on the knee"(69). Gatsby is making plans to meet Daisy again, and his change in manner is brought on by his nervousness about seeing her. Gatsby's insecurity about what Daisy might think of him after all these years leads him to ask Nick for his opinion of him, a fact which surprises Nick because it is such a change from Gatsby's usual aloof confidence. In fact, Gatsby is so rattled as he draws near the critical moment in achieving his dream that he is unable even to be direct with Nick. Instead of just asking him if Nick would plan a meeting, he arranges for "Miss Baker [to] speak to [him] about this matter"(72). This is a crucial moment in Gatsby's life, and its weight is illustrated in his unusual behavior.

(Notice that the writer has used the passage to illustrate important changes in the character. The writer uses specific examples and ties the passage to other moments in the book.)

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!

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. 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

Sample Summary vs. Analysis

Below you will find examples of each using some of the texts we've read in class, and some other texts you may not be familiar with. Identify which of these passages demonstrates close reading analysis and which ones merely summarize the text.

SNOW:

1.) Charles Baxter's "Snow" is a coming-of-age story about Russell, a bored 12-year-old who apprentices himself to his older brother, Ben, as Ben dangerously attempts to dazzle his girlfriend on a frozen lake. Russell narrates the story as an adult looking back on events many years after they've taken place.

Russell's hair-combing experiment—like many things in the story—is symbolic of his attempt to grow up. "Twelve years old, and I was so bored I was combing my hair just for the hell of it." (Baxter 1) Russell is playing Top 40 hits on the radio and trying to make his hair look "casual and sharp and perfect," (Baxter 1) but when his older brother, Ben, sees the result, he makes fun of Russell for the job he did. Later on in the story when the three of them are in the car, Stephanie persuades Russell to feed her a piece of gum and she and Ben burst out laughing at the sensuality of what she's put him through. Russell doesn't understand exactly what has happened, yet he recognizes how it registers with the teenagers.

2.) Throughout the short story, Baxter often repeats certain words that in order to change their meaning or how the reader may interpret them. For example, the repetition of the word “thrill” when Russell, Ben and Stephanie are going to see the car that is stuck beneath the ice of the frozen lake. When she asks if anyone was hurt, Russell, the child, immediately tells her the truth: "No." But Ben instantly counters with, "Maybe," offering that there might be a dead body in the backseat or the trunk. Later, when she demands to know why he misled her, he says, "I just wanted to give you a thrill." (Baxter 4) The thrills continue when Ben gets his car and starts spinning it on the ice on his way to pick up Stephanie. As the narrator says, "He was having a thrill and soon would give Stephanie another thrill by driving her home across ice that might break at any time. Thrills did it, whatever it was. Thrills led to other thrills" (Baxter 5). The numbing repetition of the word "thrill" in this passage emphasizes Russell's alienation from -- and ignorance of -- the thrills Ben and Stephanie are seeking. The phrase "whatever it was" creates a sense that Russell is giving up hope of ever understanding why the teenagers are behaving as they are. Likewise, when Stephanie asks Russell for advice to get Ben's attention, Russell tells her to take off her shoes, pointing again to his naiveté about seduction and romantic relationships. As Russell watches Stephanie follow through with his idea, we are reminded that he is only an observer—just as he is an observer of adulthood throughout the story. He describes the site in great detail, recalling the "Bare feet with painted toenails on the ice -- this was a desperate and beautiful sight, and I shivered and felt my fingers curling inside my gloves" (Baxter 7). However, this moment exemplifies a change in Russell, and although he is not a participant in the flirtation with Stephanie, his newfound curiosity is illustrated through a physical manifestation of his curling fingers. Yet despite the change the reader sees in Russell, it is still unnoticed by Stephanie, and Russell's status as an observer rather than a participant is confirmed in her answer when he asks her how it feels: "'You'll know,' she said. 'You'll know in a few years'" (Baxter 7).

Her comment implies so many of the things he'll know—the desperation of unrequited affection, the relentless impulse to seek new thrills, and the "bad judgment" of teenagers, which seems to be "a powerful antidote to boredom."

What We Talk about When We Talk about Love:

1.) In "What We Talk about When We Talk about Love" by Raymond Carver we have the theme of love and the difficulties that can come with trying to define what love is. In the story, Carver uses alcohol to highlight the flow of conversation. When the bottle of gin is full the conversation is flowing but by the end when Mel spills his glass, a signal that there is no more gin, it also signals the end of the conversation. This could be important as it may be an example of Carver using alcohol as a symbol throughout the story. It might also be a case that Mel (and Terri) have difficulty discussing past relationships without the aid of alcohol, using the alcohol to numb how they really feel. It is also possible that Carver is using light in the story as symbolism. At the beginning of the story the reader learns that the kitchen is filled with sunlight. Carver may be using the symbolism of light to suggest a clarity. However this sense of clarity fades later in the story just as the light fades in the kitchen and it becomes dark. Though it may also be a case that the loss of clarity may be caused by the fact that each character is drinking and if anything their thought processes are becoming clouded.

2.) Throughout his short story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," Carver uses alcohol to symbolize the alienating powers of love. As the two couples are sharing their stories, alcohol is inextricably linked to their ability to verbalize what they know about love. Initially the alcohol gives the couples the feeling that they're moving towards a mutual understanding of love. "We raised our glasses again and grinned at each other like children who had agreed on something

forbidden,” says Mel (Carver 55). This shared knowing grin indicates that the couples believe they are approaching a powerful and uniting understanding of love. As more stories are shared and more alcohol is consumed, the couples become confused and disillusioned in their discussions of love. When eventually the alcohol runs out, the couples are no longer able to share their stories and are left even more isolated than they were in the beginning. “I could hear the human noise we sat there making, not one of us moving, not even when the room went dark,” concludes Nick. (145).

Though the characters are desperate to communicate about love, when the alcohol is gone they are incapable of expressing themselves. Through the linking of alcohol and love in the story, we can see that Carver is highlighting how love can be an alienating and confusing experience. Alcohol is not capable of nourishing someone, and neither is love, in *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. Though Mel, Nick, Laura, and Terri initially set out to reach a deeper understanding of love, the fact that at the end of their discussion they are left silent and drunk in a darkened room more confused than they began indicates that love does not have the power to illuminate or unite.

How To Date a Brown Girl

1.) The tone on Junot Diaz "How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie is quite informal. The narrator of the short story is almost writing a letter to the young man. It is a monologue to a person the narrator is quite comfortable with. The vocabulary is very conversational, one that could be heard between two New Yorkers, two relatives. Junot Diaz narrator is giving advice to the young man, what to expect and how to act when exploring the world of sexuality, and how different girls should be treated different ways. It tells of the bewildering jungle that is adolescent, dating from other races, the never ending attempt to impress girls, to seduce girls, not knowing how far is to far, and how we always have disappointments. The story brings

to light many of the common stereotypes of girls. These stereotypes affect the way he treats these girls because of the preconceived notions that he has about them. He already has ideas in his head about how they act and what they will do in certain situations. He puts on a front in order to get what he wants from these girls, he is trying to impress these girls but can't forget to "put away the government cheese" at the end.

2.)

"How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie" is a complex story that explores the ideas of the intermixing and blending of people that are culturally different from one another. Yunior's own character struggles to identify as white, Dominican, black or Spanish translates into how he perceives the girls of color that he dates. He attempts to place them into identifiable categories. Diaz's choice to incorporate Spanish diction and slang allows the reader to gain insight on the narrator's cultural and socioeconomic situation, and his internal struggle with his own identity.

Throughout the story, Diaz uses diction to communicate the main character Yunior's background and Dominican influence. He toggles back and forth between New Jersey influenced English and broken Spanish, communicating his still distant familial ties to his old country. The use of diction directly reflects the central idea. Flowing from one country to the other, the diction used is a blend of two places and two identities. One important quote that illustrates the feelings Yunior has about his heritage appears when he says, "Run a hand through your hair like the whiteboys do even though the only thing that runs easily through your hair is Africa" (Diaz 256). This particular sentence expresses Yunior's lack of self-esteem and confidence in his surroundings as a minority in his community. This idea is amplified when he instructs the reader to, "tell her that you love her hair, that you love her skin, her lips, because, in truth, you love them more than you love your own" (Diaz 257). These moments could easily be overlooked, but Yunior's idealization of dating white girls as being the ultimate departure from his multi-cultural background is important in order to understand his feelings of inadequacy.