

Summary Versus Analysis

№ 13 in the Writing Center Handout Series

When writing a paper, it is often necessary to summarize plot, historical events, or another author's ideas. Summary can be a very useful tool for furthering your paper's argument; however, summary for its own sake has no place in an analytical paper. The trick is to separate useful summary from unnecessary summary when developing an analysis. Here are some tips to help you increase your analysis.

Analysis is not summary.

This may seem obvious, but it is easy to write several pages of summary and think you have analyzed the topic in depth because it is all factual and fills the page requirement. Summary does not go beneath the surface; analysis does. Summary can be an analytical tool, when used to support a point within your analysis. But summary and analysis are not interchangeable.

Don't just repeat what someone else has said better.

Your voice should be present in your paper. Instead of just saying what your sources have already said, you should be making your own points. You should attempt to use the facts everyone knows are true to prove something people may not know is true. The facts everyone knows are *summary*. The point you are proving is *analysis*.

Prove something that needs proving.

When you write an analytical paper, you should not be describing an obvious concept. Analysis goes beyond description into examination and explanation. Making sure your thesis goes beyond the obvious will help you cut down on summary. Ask yourself if someone reasonably could argue the opposite of your thesis. If so, then you probably have an analytical thesis statement.

Relate summary directly to the point you are making.

What is the significance of the event or plot point you are describing? How does the event help prove your thesis? What part does the description play in your argument? If it's not clear how what you've written relates to your thesis, then you should either take the summary out or reevaluate how it fits into your paper.

More than a few sentences of plot summary is usually too much.

Try not to fall into the trap of relating the relevant summary, then feeling you need to explain every detail of the story surrounding it. If you are trying to prove that Jimmy's fear of clowns comes from his traumatic birthday party experience, you only need to mention the relevant birthday party. Why his mom threw the party, or how many people were there, or why Sandra didn't come are all irrelevant background information.

Get someone else to read your paper.

Sometimes it's hard to tell whether something you've written is a relevant part of your argument or just unnecessary summary. Getting someone else—a writing center tutor, for example—to read the paper gives you a new perspective with some objective distance. Your reader should be able to understand your argument without feeling like she is reading a book report.

For more information on summary and analysis, see

Info on analysis: <http://www.richmond.edu/~writing/wweb/analysis.html>



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