

Summary V. Analysis

Summary and analysis are two important tools of academic writing. However, sometimes it can be difficult to tell the difference between the two. This handout will help you understand how summary differs from analysis and how each is used in academic writing.

Summary

Summary is a brief understanding of the main point (thesis) or most important points (supporting points) of a text or source. When writing a summary, the writer should put the main idea or point in their own words. A summary is usually much shorter than the source it is summarizing, typically just a few sentences.

Summaries are objective

Summaries should only focus on communicating the main idea(s) of a source. In a summary, the writer should avoid commenting on or evaluating the source. The writer's tone and word choice should stay as objective as possible so that the writer's view and opinions about the source are not included in the summary.

What to include in a summary

Summaries usually include information about the source, such as title, author, and publication information. Summaries also usually try to answer “What,” “Who,” and “Where” questions.

Why write summary

Summaries are meant to introduce and/or provide background for a source. Writers use summaries to describe the source they are using, as opposed to evaluating or commenting on it. Summary often precede analysis and help prepare the reader for the writer’s ideas about the source.

Analysis

Unlike summary, analysis relies on the observations, ideas, evaluations, and inferences of the writer. When writing analysis, it is the writer’s job to comment on the source and explain its meaning, purpose, or effect. Typically, analysis is longer than the piece that it is analyzing.

Analysis is subjective & interpretive

When writing analysis, your job is to break your source into smaller pieces or elements and examine them for purpose, meaning, or effect. Analysis "interprets" those pieces, explaining their meaning and how they relate to the larger source. The job of analysis is to break a source into smaller parts and explain how those parts work together.

Analysis goes beyond the obvious

While summary is concerned with “What,” “Who,” and “Where” questions, analysis is more about answering “How” and “Why” questions. Instead of simply relaying the main idea or message of a source, analysis looks at smaller pieces of the source, explaining how those pieces work and why (or why not) they may be effective, successful, true, or good.

What to include in analysis

Analysis should include your judgments, evaluations, and claims about meaning. It should offer a way to think about or interpret a source. Analysis is an important part of arguments, so sections of analysis usually include references to your thesis or the argument of your essay.

Why write analysis

Analysis helps you support your essay’s thesis by explaining how and why different sources fit into your argument. Analysis offers your readers an interpretation of the sources and why they support your point of view or claim.

Sample Summary & Analysis

Summary

Star Wars is an American movie that was released in 1977. Often described as a “space opera,” the movie focuses on the Rebel Alliance, an interstellar revolutionary faction lead by a princess, and its attempts to overthrow the totalitarian regime of the Empire by blowing up its new space station, the Death Star. During the film, Luke Skywalker, a young farm boy, discovers the mysterious cult of “Jedi” that uses a mystical power called the “Force.” After joining the rebellion alongside a pirate and his furry friend, Luke helps the Rebels destroy the Death Star.

Analysis

In order to truly understand *Star Wars*, viewers must put it in the correct context—the seemingly simple space opera is really a nearly perfect postmodern film. From the famous opening scroll of the prologue to Vader’s samurai helmet to the John Ford-esque Western antihero of Han Solo, the sum total of *Star Wars* is much more than a summer blockbuster (though it was that too). It is a mash-up of movies references spanning nearly a hundred years that, when assembled, brings to life not only a galaxy far, far away but also an endlessly referential film that rejects a fixed genre in favor of endless contexts and interpretations.

Works Consulted

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