



Summary vs. Analysis

A-State Online Writing Center

Students apply research, critical thinking, (and therefore, analysis), and foundational knowledge to the educational field to make practical and progressive decisions. The emphasis of applying research and foundational knowledge to improve best practices, analyzing current systems, and a variety of perspectives is important for students to consider.

Without critical thinking and analysis, the same problems in your fields will continue. It is important to have the ability to not only understand through summary but also to make assertions and changes through analysis.

What the experts say

“The purpose of writing an article precis [summary and analysis] is to demonstrate that you have read, understood, and can apply scholarship in the field of educational leadership, and to demonstrate your critical thinking abilities.”

-Dr. Timberly Baker, A-State Ed. Department

How are you applying what you have learned in the classroom when you read texts and write about them?

“The analysis therefore has to tackle not the grammatical or logical layer of the text but has to look into the pragmatic aspect of discourse or text in the social communication.”

--Eva Klemenčič and Mitja Čepič Vogrinčič, “Analysis of Texts in the Field of Education: A Regulation on Textbook Approval and a History Textbook”

In other words, students need to read beyond cursory level information to dissect the messages the text contributes to the overall social discourse. How can you, as a writer, contribute to the topic you’re reading about?

Summarizing texts

Often, writers confuse summary and analysis. When summarizing a topic, report, article, or etc., writers paraphrase their understanding of the material to provide readers with a condensed version. Therefore, writers are stating the main points of what they have read.

Writers are not yet making arguments or conclusions; they are reporting what happened or what the authors have stated in the text.

How to Summarize: Breakdown

Summarizing a text includes answering questions such as the following:

- What are the main points or arguments the author is trying to assert?
- Why does the author claim these points are important to the field?
- How does the author try to further their argument(s)?
- What method(s) did the author use to reach their conclusion?
- Analysis, on the other hand, goes above summarizing the main points and methods used.
- When analyzing texts, students need to ask themselves if the main arguments and methods used by the author are effective. This is where critical thinking comes into play.
- Writers should consider why they are choosing a topic to study within the context of their field and major areas of study. If you did not pick the topic, you still need to consider how this topic relates to your field of study and overall career interests.

Analyzing texts

- Analysis, on the other hand, goes above summarizing the main points and methods used.
- When analyzing texts, students need to ask themselves if the main arguments and methods used by the author are effective. This is where critical thinking comes into play.
- Writers should consider why they are choosing a topic to study within the context of their field and major areas of study. If you did not pick the topic, you still need to consider how this topic relates to your field of study and overall career interests.

How to Analyze: Breakdown

1st reading: Take it in and decipher what the article is about. This first reading contributes to summarizing the article's contents.

2nd reading: Annotate everything in the article that has relevance to your prompt or study; this means to write questions in the margins, underline words that you are unfamiliar with to look them up later, highlight terms, circle words, etc. This is the first step to analyzing--going deeper than just what the author says and making connections to your field's research and your own observations about the text.

3rd reading: Do some research, too. Answer reflection questions you posed while reading, look up words you do not understand, and read between the lines! This will help you analyze rather than summarize.

Reflection Questions to Consider While Reading

- When broken down, which elements do you consider significant or effective?
- Which elements seem ineffective or weak? What propels the author's argument?
- What detracts from the author's argument?
- What conclusions can you draw as a reader?
- What argument(s) would you make about the text based on your conclusions?
- How can you apply what you have learned in the classroom in your writing about the text?

Case study example

For example, writers may be asked to analyze a case study. Writers would then summarize the case briefly before diving into their understanding and interpretation of the research from a third-person point of view.

Writers can make definitive arguments about how the research was conducted, the author's main points, any biases presented, visuals used, and much more. By doing this, writers go beyond stating the obvious and add to the discussion of the text with their own interpretation--or analysis--of the arguments.

Another example includes writing a Research Article Precis for Dr. Baker's course. For this assignment, students would need to select relevant academic articles to then analyze for their paper.

In the linked guide, she breaks down how to format the precis (analysis) paper and which questions to ask yourself while reading in order to analyze texts effectively.

Sources consulted:

Eva Klemenčič and Mitja Čepič Vogrinčič, "Analysis of Texts in the Field of Education: A Regulation on Textbook Approval and a History Textbook"