

“What does ‘This paper needs more analysis’ actually mean?”
Exploring the difference between analyzing and summarizing in essay writing

Have you ever gotten a paper back with the comment “needs more analysis”? Not quite sure what that means? This handout is for you! In many college classes, essay assignments require you to go further than just stating what your evidence/quote says (summary)—they want you to analyze. Knowing what to write about can be confusing without a clear idea of what these terms mean. Here is a description and example of **summary**:

Summary: Summarizing text is retelling it without your own ideas or interpretations about it. When you summarize, you are answering these questions about the text:

- 1¹. Who: those involved
2. What: the event or topic being covered
3. When: time, period, era, night or day
4. Where: the location, distance, place
5. Why: the cause or causes
6. How: the process(es)

Example: Give a brief summary of Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet*.

Summary of *Hamlet*²

The play *Hamlet* is one of betrayal and death. In the beginning of the play Hamlet’s uncle Claudius, kills Hamlet’s father with poison. He does this because he wants to be king, and he wants Gertrude, Hamlet’s mother. Hamlet is very upset, becoming more so when his father’s ghost starts haunting him. He becomes even more upset when Claudius and his mother, Gertrude, announce they are to be married. Hamlet cannot believe that they would do this after such a short period of time. Hamlet then decides to kill his uncle to get revenge. However, Hamlet, who is beginning to go mad, waits to do this. In the meantime Hamlet’s girlfriend Ofelia goes crazy with grief and drowns herself. At the end of the play, Gertrude, Claudius, and Hamlet are all killed.

Here the author gives a general description of **what**.

The author introduces some of the characters (**who**).

Why

Why

Why

Who and how

How

On the other hand, **analyzing** text is evaluating it, interpreting it, and making connections. College-level analysis is more than stating your opinion. It “provides an evaluation and assessment of information backed by substantive arguments and direct proof. It also indicates the significance of a given topic, question, or argument, even beyond the scope of an individual

¹ “Analysis vs. Summary.” *comptalk.fiu.edu*. Florida State University, n.d. Web. 29 Jul. 2013.
² Adapted from “Analysis vs. Summary.” *comptalk.fiu.edu*. Florida State University, n.d. Web. 29 Jul. 2013.

paper.”³ Drawing significance “beyond the scope of your paper” means making a connection between your point and a real world context. An example of this is given below.

Analysis: Analysis examines the summary elements listed above in order to look for their meaning in the following contexts:

- 1.⁴ Relationships, trends, patterns
2. Roles of people, places, objects, situations
3. Consequences or results of events, decisions and processes
4. Causes and their effects
5. Advantages and disadvantages/ gains and losses
6. Strengths and weaknesses

Example: Give a brief analysis of Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet*

A Freudian Analysis of *Hamlet*⁵

While death occurs by literal poisoning in *Hamlet*, these acts are caused by and perpetuate an underlying psychological poison throughout the play, such as the internal conflict between Hamlet’s id, ego, and superego explained by Freudian psychology. Hamlet’s suppressed desire for his mother, stemming from the Oedipus complex in the id, leads to his own psychological poisoning. Hamlet is jealous of Claudius when he announces that he will marry Gertrude, his mother: ‘Go not to mine uncle’s bed’ (III, III, 153). Claudius killed Hamlet’s father to be with Gertrude, and Hamlet was upset that he too desired to kill Claudius in order to possess his mother. He desired to seek revenge on those who had hurt him, also caused by his id: ‘Here thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane, Drink of this potion’ (V, II, 330-333). However, Hamlet hesitated to kill his uncle because of his superego, such as when he states ‘How I stand then, That have a father killed, a mother stained, Excitements of my reason and my blood, And let all asleep’ (IV, IV, 56-59). These inner psychological conflicts prevented Hamlet from acting until it was too late and death was already knocking on his door. Hamlet dies at the end of the play, though not before he exacts his revenge on Claudius, physically poisoning him to death. However, this death was ultimately caused by psychological rather than literal poisoning.

The author argues for an alternate cause of death, beyond physical poison, and **makes connections** between different types of poison.

Cause and effect

Textual evidence for the cause and effect claim.

The author refers to an idea from psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, **drawing significance beyond the scope of the current paper.**

Cause and effect

In short, analysis builds on summary’s **who/what/when/where** foundation and, using textual evidence and critical thinking, goes into more detail about **why**.

³ Sadowski, Sarah. “Summary Versus Analysis.” *fitchburgstate.edu*. Fitchburg State University, 2009. Web. 30 Jul. 2013.

⁴ “Analysis vs. Summary.” *comptalk.fiu.edu*. Florida State University, n.d. Web. 29 Jul. 2013.

⁵ Adapted from “Analysis vs. Summary.” *comptalk.fiu.edu*. Florida State University, n.d. Web. 29 Jul. 2013.