



PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY

The Writing Center Presents:

Literary Analysis

Summary vs. Analysis

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Summarizing – How Do You Know if You're Doing It?

How do I know if I'm summarizing?

- As you read through your essay, ask yourself the following questions:
 - Am I stating something that would be obvious to a reader or viewer?
 - Does my essay move through the plot, history, or author's argument in chronological order, or in the exact same order the author used?

How to Recognize Summarization

- Am I simply describing *what* happens, *where* it happens, or *whom* it happens to?
 - A "yes" to any of these questions may be a sign that you are summarizing. If you answer yes to the questions below, though, it is a sign that your paper may have more analysis (which is usually a good thing):
- Am I making an original argument about the text?
- Have I arranged my evidence around my own points, rather than just following the author's or plot's order?

How to Recognize Summarization

- Am I explaining *why* or *how* an aspect of the text is significant?
- Certain phrases are warning signs of summary. Keep an eye out for these:
 - "[*This essay*] is about..."
 - "[*This book*] is the story of..."
 - "[*This author*] writes about..."
 - "[*This movie*] is set in..."

Literary Analysis

- Analysis requires breaking something—like a story, poem, play, theory, or argument—into parts so you can understand how those parts work together to make the whole.
- Ideally, you should begin to analyze a work as you read or view it instead of waiting until after you're done—it may help you to jot down some notes as you read.

Analyzing

- Your notes can be about major themes or ideas you notice, as well as anything that intrigues, puzzles, excites, or irritates you.
- Remember, analytic writing goes beyond the obvious to discuss questions of how and why—so ask yourself those questions as you read.

Analyzing

- Identify evidence that supports or illustrates the main point or theme as well as anything that seems to contradict it.
- Consider the relationship between the words and the visuals in the work.
 - Are they well integrated, or are they sometimes at odds with one another?
 - What functions do the visuals serve? To capture attention? To provide more detailed information or illustration? To appeal to readers' emotions?

Analyzing

- Decide whether the sources used are trustworthy.
- Identify the work's underlying assumptions about the subject, as well as any biases it reveals.
- Once you have written a draft, some questions you might want to ask yourself about your writing are

Analyzing

- "What's my point?" or "What am I arguing in this paper?"
- If you can't answer these questions, then you haven't gone beyond summarizing.
- You may also want to think about how much of your writing comes from your own ideas or arguments.
- If you're only reporting someone else's ideas, you probably aren't offering an analysis.

Strategies to Avoid Excessive Summarization

- Read the assignment (the prompt) as soon as you get it. Make sure to reread it before you start writing. Go back to your assignment often while you write.
- Formulate an argument (including a good thesis) and be sure that your final draft is structured around it, including aspects of the plot, story, history, background, etc. only as evidence for your argument.

Strategies to Avoid Excessive Summarization

- Read critically—imagine having a dialogue with the work you are discussing.
 - What parts do you agree with?
 - What parts do you disagree with?
 - What questions do you have about the work?
 - Does it remind you of other works you've seen?
- Make sure you have clear topic sentences that make arguments in support of your thesis statement.

Should I Summarize if I'm Writing a Review?

- That depends.
- If you're writing a critique of a piece of literature, a film, or a dramatic performance, you don't necessarily need to give away much of the plot.
- The point is to let readers decide whether they want to enjoy it for themselves. If you do summarize, keep your summary brief and to the point.

Should I Summarize if I'm Writing a Review?

- Instead of telling your readers that the play, book, or film was "boring," "interesting," or "really good," tell them specifically what parts of the work you're talking about.
- It's also important that you go beyond adjectives and explain how the work achieved its effect (how was it interesting?) and why you think the author/director wanted the audience to react a certain way.

Should I Summarize if I'm Writing a Review?

- If you're writing a review of an academic book or article, it may be important for you to summarize the main ideas and give an overview of the organization so your readers can decide whether it is relevant to their specific research interests.

All Information Obtained From:

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- Zinsser, William. On Writing Well. 5th ed. New York: Harper Perennial, 1994.
- "Strategies for Avoiding Plot Summary." Temple University Writing Center. 18 January 2005 <http://www.temple.edu/writingctr/student_resources/plot_summary.htm>.

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