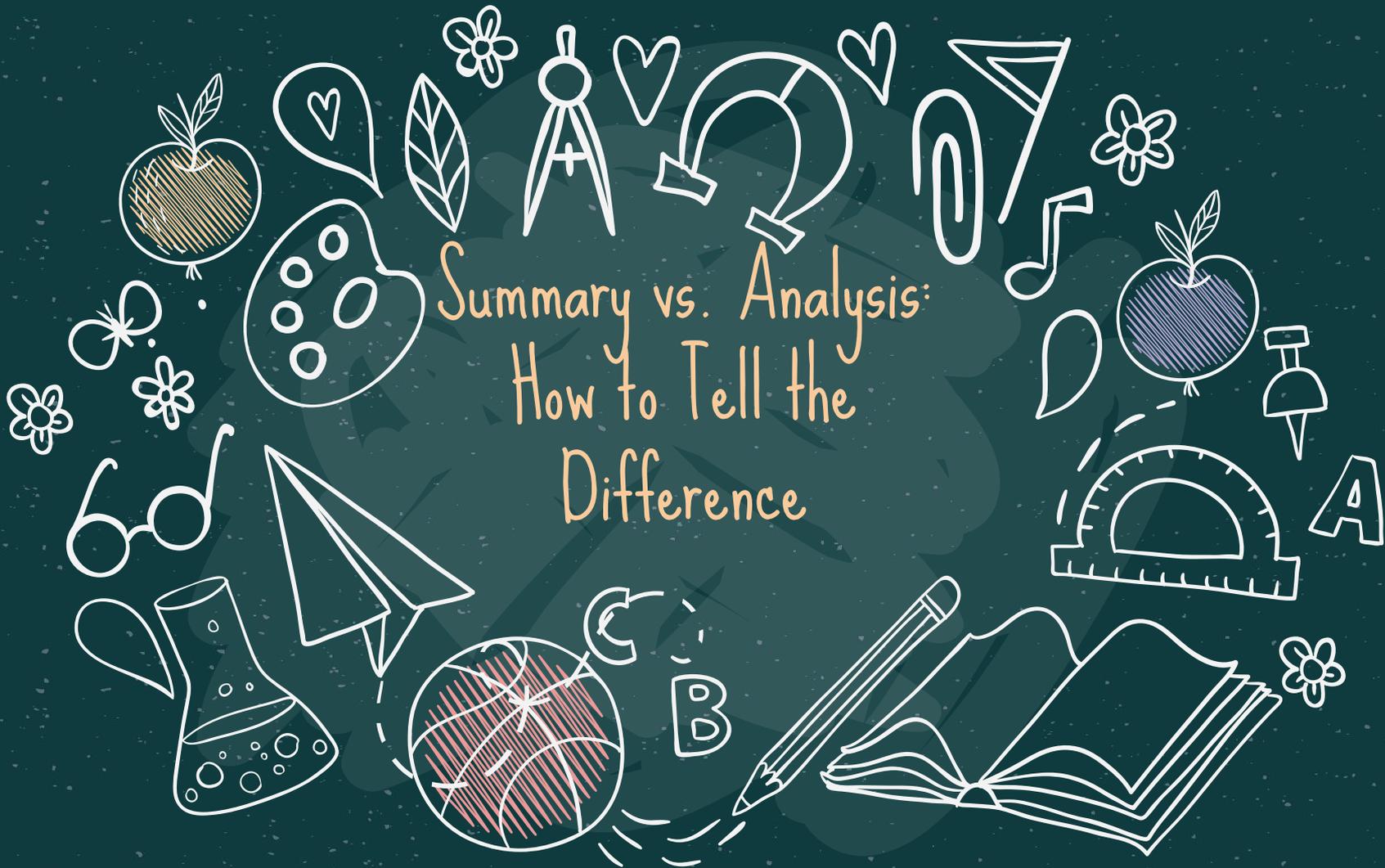


Summary vs. Analysis:
How to Tell the
Difference



Analysis



comes from the Greek word meaning "to break up."

"Ana" - up

"Lysis" -a loosening

When we analyze something to interpret its meaning there are two important steps to remember:

1. Break things up into smaller pieces to look at them closely.
2. Look for patterns which connect these smaller pieces.

What's the difference between a summary of a text and an analysis of a text?

Summary

- Describes facts, details or situations from the text.
- Answers the questions what, who, where, and when.
- Summaries will usually relay information in chronological order using words like "after, then, later, etc."
- Describes the plot of a story or a scene by stating what happened.

Analysis

- Interprets meanings or recognizes patterns in the text.
- Answers the questions why or how?
- After providing evidence, an analysis uses words like "shows, suggests, illustrates, represents, conveys, demonstrates, symbolizes, means, etc."
- Tells the reader what the story means, highlights or conveys.
- Avoids literal interpretations of a text and instead focuses on abstract interpretations.

Should we use both summary and analysis in our writing?

Yes! But, remember it is less important to describe or repeat the plot of the story than it is to show how that plot highlights your ideas. Your ideas are the MOST IMPORTANT parts of your writing, so always analyze your texts to show how they illustrate your points and keep your summary to a minimum.



Summary Example

Summary is essentially a list of events without any sort of opinion or extra information from the writer. For example, if you were writing about Romeo and Juliet, you might summarize it by saying,

Romeo and Juliet's families are feuding. Romeo and Juliet meet and fall in love. The two get married and make a plan to run away together. Juliet drinks a potion to fake her death so that the two of them can escape their families. Romeo sees Juliet's sleeping body and assumes she is dead. He then kills himself. Juliet wakes up to find Romeo dead, and then proceeds to kill herself because of that.

Summaries like this are helpful for understanding basic plot elements, but they don't give your professor a chance to see what you know. They also don't leave any room to point back to your overall argument. This is where analysis comes in.

(Excerpt from the UT Dallas Writing Center's resources)

Analysis Example

Analysis differs from summary in that analysis is a closer look at a particular piece of a source that points to a thesis. For example, if your thesis is that Shakespeare is arguing that the power of love is the most important thing in the play, you might say something like this:

Romeo sees Juliet's sleeping body and assumes she is dead. He then kills himself. This suggests that Romeo cannot or will not live without the love of Juliet. Juliet then wakes up to find Romeo dead and then proceeds to kill herself because she cannot handle his death. This suggests that Romeo and Juliet value each other over their own lives, meaning that the love is the most important thing to both of them. Their deaths are the reason their families stop fighting, which suggests that love is a powerful force in the play.

An analysis like this allows the professor to clearly see what you think about the source, and it allows you to use the text as evidence for your own argument. You can even use summaries as a starting point, like we did above, but it is important to go into more detail and connect what you're talking about back to your thesis.

(Excerpt from the UT Dallas Writing Center's resources) This example doesn't use textual evidence. So take this a step further and integrate direct quotes into your analysis.

How to combine these in a paragraph



1. TOPIC

Your overall reason for this paragraph-



2. EXPLANATION

Say more about this. Why is this element valuable?



3. SHORT SUMMARY

Introduce your examples with a short summary of the text. (Keep this very short, only a couple sentences).



4. EXAMPLE

Pick one moment to discuss. Provide a direct quote, or description of a scene if the text is visual. Cite the source in MLA format.



5. ANALYSIS

Analyze your evidence. What elements are being used here? What does this show, mean, convey, express? (This is the most important part! Spend the most time in this section.)



6. POINT

How does this example connect to your overall argument? How does this point, evidence, or analysis show the meaning of the text?

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THANKS!

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