

# Summary vs. Analysis

At many points in your academic career and beyond, you will be asked to make and present arguments. However, an argument will do little to sway an audience without background information to support your claims. This presents the primary question writers ask when deciding a paper's content: should we devote more space to informing our readers about the subject or to furthering our own argument? Ultimately, this is a choice unique to each paper, but it is important to be able to recognize the difference between analysis and summary so that you can make an informed choice one way or the other.

1. **Research your topic.** This first step is an important one; after all, it is difficult to effectively argue about a topic if you don't fully understand it yourself. A well-researched understanding of your topic is vital if you wish to effectively summarize it. Make sure to ask yourself how and why the information you're taking in is important, thinking critically about how it fits in to discussions surrounding your topic. Some papers, such as literary analysis papers, may not require outside research, but it's still important to go through your source material and make sure you've both gathered and understood your evidence before making your argument.
2. **Identify summary versus analysis.** Once you have begun writing your essay, it is important to keep in mind what sort of content you are putting into the paper. If the content is mainly identifying, clarifying, or presenting either factual information or opposing arguments, then the content you are adding would be considered summary. However, if the content is examining, discussing, or adding valuable insight using the summarized information, then the content would be considered analysis. Generally, you want more analysis than summary. One good rule is to aim for at least a sentence or two of analysis for each sentence you summarize. You want to avoid having your own voice drowned out by summary, as that can leave your claim unsupported and weak.

## Tips:

- If you're having trouble distinguishing between summary and analysis, ask yourself this question: is this information that came from somewhere else, or is this an argument that I am making based on information? If the answer is the former, then you're working with a summary, and if it's the latter, you're working with an analysis.
- If your summary comes from a source that is not just your experience or common knowledge, **be sure to cite** it. Even if you're not using an author's exact words, using someone else's writing and information without citation is plagiarism. Citations help you give credit to your sources of information, and those sources in turn grant your writing and arguments credibility.

**Forexample:**

- Imagine you are writing a paper about a novel you read for class. An example of summary would be as follows:

*“In beginning of the book, we see the teenage protagonist sneak out, skip school, and go against her parent’s wishes in order to have fun and hang out with friends.”*

- An example of analysis following this summary would look something like this:

*“This suggests that the protagonist is in a phase of teenage rebellion. Given her disregard for her parents and her school, we can infer than she doesn’t have much respect for authority and values her own freedom and independence.”*

In the first example, we set up important background information that helps our reader understand our later arguments. In our second example, we can see how we provide insight and analysis on the facts we brought up while also furthering our argument. Pairing both summary and analysis allows us both to provide context for our arguments and give importance to the information we are conveying.

If you find you’re having trouble with this, you can book an appointment with the Writing Center, and a tutor would be happy to help you. You can also try practicing summary and analysis with different kinds of writing, such as a novel or a news article. Summary and analysis are two of the most important tools for any writer, so finding the right balance of these two kinds of writing is key to any good paper.