University of New Hampshire
Connors Writing Center

Summary and Analysis

Summary and analysis are two common elements of writing assignments. Both are means of examining a text. Summary and analysis are distinct, and it's not uncommon for faculty to specify that you are expected to move beyond summary and into analysis.

Summary

A summary is an overview of a text's main ideas. It may be short—a single sentence to describe the main argument of a 300-page book—or it may be longer—a three-page overview of that 300-page book. While we may be able to accurately capture the 300-page book in a sentence, the level of detail and length depend on what you need the summary to do.

Example:
Here is an example of a brief summary of an article which appeared on Salon.com in 2007:

> In the article "Why I Stopped Being a Vegetarian," Laura Fraser argues that vegetarianism can be selfish. She relates her personal experience with being vegetarian for 15 years, during which she justified her diet with the usual arguments: it's healthier, kinder to animals, and environmentally friendly. For her, each of those reasons was deeply flawed; she was actually less healthy and made so many exceptions for fish and other animal products that the other arguments didn't hold water. In the end, she suggests that these arguments are often excuses which help vegetarians to feel better about themselves when they force their omnivore friends and family to accommodate them.

Notice that the summary explains the main points of Fraser's article and a few of her main pieces of evidence for her argument, but the summary does not include any judgement or response to Fraser's piece.

Analysis

Analysis is an interpretation that is grounded in the text you are responding to. While summary describes *what* a text says, analysis focuses on *how* the text says it and *why* it is significant.

Example:
Below is a brief analysis of the same article we summarized above.

> In "Why I Stopped Being a Vegetarian," Fraser's argument that vegetarianism can be selfish is funny and relatable, but also unlikely to convince any vegetarians to start ordering burgers. On the one hand, her personal story is told in an informal way that keeps readers engaged and amused, as when she describes her half-hearted devotion to animal rights by saying "But who was I kidding? If I were hungry enough, I'd kill a cow in a heartbeat. I'd practically kill a

cow just for a great pair of shoes." The article is full of moments like these that make Fraser seem likable and trustworthy. However, this tone is also a central flaw of the article. By flippantly suggesting that vegetarians are actually selfish, she risks alienating the audience that might be most interested in her story.

The writer has broken down Fraser's piece, paying attention to tone (the article is funny, relatable, and engaging). Then, the writer reconsiders the whole of Fraser's piece by examining the effect of that tone—despite being engaging, Fraser's article isn't likely to be convincing to vegetarians because that same humor might alienate her audience. The analysis is about *how* the text was put together, *how* it will impact readers of the article, and *why* that impact is important.

The Relationship between Summary and Response

Writers rarely only summarize or analyze; therefore, it's important to see the relationship between summary and analysis. That relationship is part of the reason why analysis can be tricky. When you summarize a text, you're often analyzing it to determine which parts are most important and how to present them to readers. In addition, writers often use summary within analysis to explain or verify their analysis, and/or to make the reader familiar with the text they are summarizing. Below, the underlined sections within this analysis are summary or direct borrowing via quotation.

> In "Why I Stopped Being a Vegetarian," <u>Fraser's argument that vegetarianism can be selfish</u> is funny and relatable, but also unlikely to convince any vegetarians to start ordering burgers. On the one hand, her personal story is told in an informal way that keeps readers engaged and amused, as when she describes her half-hearted devotion to animal rights by saying "<u>But who was I kidding? If I were hungry enough, I'd kill a cow in a heartbeat. I'd practically kill a cow just for a great pair of shoes.</u>" The article is full of moments like these that make Fraser seem likable and trustworthy. However, this tone is also a central flaw of the article. By flippantly suggesting that vegetarians are actually selfish, she risks alienating the audience that might be most interested in her story.

Questions to Prompt Analysis

To move into analysis, begin asking questions about the text:

- What do you see as being the message or meaning of the text or part? What aspects of the text help you arrive at that meaning?
- How are the parts of the argument arranged/organized? Is there a reason the author has presented information in that particular order?
- What assumptions do you see being made in the text? What assumptions do you bring about the text (concepts, etc.)?
- Who do you imagine the audience of the text to be and how are they addressed? Do you think the audience would be convinced by this article? Why or why not?
- Who do you think is NOT the intended audience of this text? Does it matter that they are being left out?
- Who is the author and how does he/she come across in the text? What led you to see the author in this way?

Resources
Fraser, Laura. "Why I Stopped Being a Vegetarian." *Salon*. Salon Media Group, Inc., 7 Jan. 2000

NH | **Connors Writing Center**