Analysis

Introduction to Analysis

In writing, analysis is used two ways: first, you analyze a source(s) and develop a thesis on which your paper is centered, and second, you analyze evidence within your paper to demonstrate the plausibility of your main claim – the thesis.

When developing a thesis, you need to analyze your source(s) by looking at and examining every part of each source to then determine the relevance of these parts to the whole source or to the topic you are examining.

The second form of analysis is the analysis of evidence. Once you have developed an argument and selected appropriate evidence, you use analysis to explain how your evidence proves your claim. When using this kind of analysis, you take the evidence that you provide and dissect it, showing how this evidence develops your point.

What Analysis is Not

• Analysis is not a summarization of other people’s ideas: When you are writing a paper, your analysis cannot be recounting what someone else has said. You cannot use another person’s ideas to validate an argument; instead, your analysis should be your interpretation of your sources and evidence.

Example: “According to Holmes, the book depicts a world in which characters are caught between traditional beliefs and modern ideals. Ultimately, the book does portray how characters live in a time in which they must confront how modern ideals influence their traditional beliefs.”

In this example, the writer does not develop his/her own interpretation of the book, but rather, takes Holmes’ argument and presents it as their own. In this case, the writer may even be plagiarizing because he/she is simply stealing another author’s ideas.

• Analysis is not plot summary: Oftentimes, writers include data, quotes or plot summary in a paper without analyzing it because the data, quote or plot summary seems self-evident. Students tell themselves that they do not need to explain the quote or plot summary because it explains itself. However, when a writer does this, he/she is making two assumptions: first, the writer assumes that there is only one way in which the data, quote, or plot summary can be interpreted, and second, the writer assumes that the reader thinks in the same way that the writer does.

Example: “Little Red Riding Hood is not scared of the wolf; this proves that Little Red Riding Hood is naïve.”

In this example, the writer assumes that the reader will believe that Little Red Riding Hood’s lack of fear stems from her innocence. Additionally, the writer assumes that the only way Little Red Riding’s Hood’s lack of fear can be interpreted is as a sign of naivety. What the writer neglects to
explain is how Little Red Riding Hood’s lack of fear shows her innocence. Is Little Red Riding Hood unafraid because she is unaware of the danger the wolf poses? Or is she unafraid because she just thinks that she can control the wolf? How does her not being afraid show that she is naïve?

- Analysis is not the same thing as evidence: Sometimes writers use analysis to explain why their thesis is plausible without giving the reader any evidence. Without presenting concrete evidence, the reader is left with the writer’s interpretation of a subject and has now way to verify the writer’s claims.

Example: “The movie The Searchers portrays Ethan as a man trying to maintain his ethnic purity. This proves that he wants to his family to be white not Indian.”

In this example, the writer makes a claim in the first sentence and analyzes this claim in the second sentence. However, when the writer says “this proves” in the second sentence, what is he/she referring to? Does the writer’s argument prove his next claim? No, it doesn’t. The writer needs to provide evidence that supports his claim such as “Ethan tells Martin that he won’t associate him because he is part Native American.”

- Analysis does not prove a claim; instead, it tries to show why that claim is plausible: When a writer interprets sources, he/she should keep in mind that the way they interpret the source is not the only way in which the source can be interpreted. Additionally, writers should note that it is impossible to prove that what they argue is 100% accurate. Subsequently, writers should think of their arguments as valid, arguable interpretations of whatever evidence or data that they are using.

Example: When the narrator states that “Sara hates animals,” this proves that Sara is a mean person.

In this example, the writer should use a word like “suggests” or “indicates” instead of proves. It is possible that Sara hates animals because she is scared of them, not because she is a mean person.

**Tips for Analyzing Sources to Develop a Thesis**

Ask questions about the data or source that you are working with. When developing an argument, here are a few questions you should consider:

1. What does this text or data say about the work that I am examining as a whole?
2. What is the most significant or critical part of my source? Why is it the most significant?
3. What is the author trying to reveal through this source?
4. Does the work or data you are examining have any themes or trends?

**What is Analysis in a Paper?**

After the writer has developed his/her paper’s thesis, the writer uses evidence and analysis to support and develop that thesis. Secondary analysis is showing how evidence supports the writer’s main and secondary claims.
Analysis should be:

• A plausible interpretation of evidence that should focus on what the evidence actually says without simplifying its meaning.

• An explanation of how and why your evidence relates to your claims and supports your conclusions

Analysis should not be:

• A distortion or simplification of evidence that forces evidence to support your conclusion or argument

**Differentiating Between Evidence and Analysis**

Most writers struggle the most with differentiating evidence from analysis. The best way to determine whether a writer is using evidence or analysis is to ask how a sentence or sentences function. Evidence recounts or reproduces what a source presents whereas analysis is the writer’s interpretation of the evidence.

For instance, evidence might tell you that a story’s character does not like to read. Analysis of this story would explain the significance of the character’s dislike of reading. Here are the questions analysis might address: Why is it important that this character does not like reading? What does this aspect of the character say about the character or story as a whole?