Summary vs. Analysis

While we sometimes need to summarize the important points of a text (as we do for our Content Summaries), must of the time we will be analyzing texts. So what's the difference?

- **Summary** is the reduction of a text into a smaller easier to understand format
    - It is a generally objective restatement of the main ideas of a text in your own words
    - Does not generally present an argument or opinion about the text
    - Answers the question "What?"
- **Analysis** is the close examination of a text and its properties to come to a deeper understanding of it.
    - It is generally a subjective interpretation of the text and its rhetorical elements
    - Usually presents an argument or opinion about the text
    - Answers the questions "Why?" and "How?"

Analysis

So what is analysis? Analysis is about coming to a deeper understanding of a text through an examination of its rhetorical elements. Analysis requires breaking something—like an article, essay, story, poem, play, theory, or argument—into parts so you can understand how those parts work together to make the whole. In essence, it is a search for the *meaning* of a text by looking at the choices an author makes.

- What do I mean by the "meaning" of a text?
    - What the text is actually communicating to its audience
    - The deeper core of the text beyond the immediate, surface-level understanding
- To determine meaning an analysis:
    - Examines and interprets the **rhetorical elements** of a text (i.e., the rhetorical choices present in a text)
        - Rhetorical Elements include things like metaphor, simile, analogy, imagery, word choice, tone, syntax, punctuation, etc.
    - Discusses *why* an element is important or significant
    - Discusses *how* an element creates meaning
        - Might discuss causes and effects
        - Might discuss strengths and weaknesses or advantages and disadvantages
        - Might discuss effectiveness or ineffectiveness

Analytical Moves

1. Suspend judgment
    a. This is a pre-condition to analysis to leave room for understanding before judgment
2. Define significant parts

    a. Pay close attention to details, looking at key words and components rather than the big ideas
    b. Identify the rhetorical elements and choices
3. Look for patterns and anomalies
    a. What repeats? What goes with what (strands)? What is opposed to what (binaries)? What doesn't fit (anomalies)?
4. Make the implicit explicit
    a. In other words, make what is not obviously stated obviously stated
    b. What are the implications of what is being said?
    c. Why/how are these implications significant?
    d. Identify the work's underlying assumptions about the subject, as well as any biases it reveals
5. Keep reformulating questions and explanations
    a. Experiment with different questions and approaches
    b. Ask a lot of questions of / pose many challenges to the text

Avoiding Excessive Summary

While summary can be an important part of most essays, it is easy to rely too much on summary and avoid the analysis that most assignments call for. You might use summary to provide background, set the stage, or illustrate supporting evidence, but keep it brief. Generally, most of your paper should focus on your argument. Here are some strategies to help avoid excessive summary:

- Make sure that your final draft is structured around the argument made in your thesis statement, including aspects of summary only as you need it
- Review your paper using two different highlighters/colors to mark your paper
    - With one color, highlight areas of summary or description. With the other, highlight areas of analysis
    - See how much of each you have and consider whether you have too much summary for the assignment
- As you read through your essay, ask yourself the following questions (yes answers are potential signs of unnecessary summary):
    - 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?
    - Am I simply describing what happens, where it happens, or whom it happens to?
    - Am I giving a lot of detail but not providing significant analysis of those details?