Summary vs Analysis

What is "textual analysis"? It is a type of academic writing that entails making a subjective determination about the specific *ways* in which a writer writes and communicates and then discussing whether or not those particular strategies are effective or not, and why you think so. It is quite different from and much more complex than simple summary description of a piece of writing. When you analyze a text, you assess the effectiveness of the writing itself, without describing or commenting on the thematic content of the piece. It does not matter what an author believes or if those ideas are applicable to life outside the text or what you think about those ideas. What does matter is *how* a writer writes (not what he/she says) and why you think those ways of speaking are effective or not. Textual analysis identifies specific writing strategies and addresses how those contribute to the overall success or failure of a piece of writing.

Paragraph Openings

Missing or underdeveloped topic idea statement. This opening lacks a **topic focus** and is instead only a summary description of the text and/or a lead-in to a quote. A summary lead-in is not the same thing as a topic sentence. A topic sentence is an idea statement, it's an extension of your thesis argument, or at least as aspect of it. It's meant to be the place where you announce the bit of argument you'll be pursuing and defending in the rest of the paragraph. Opening sentences for body paragraphs must announce the central argument or point to be explored in the paragraph *before* leading in to a quote or a textual paraphrase. The topic sentence is the most important element of your body paragraph as it sets the focus for everything to follow. It needs to be all in your own language and it must announce your main paragraph arguments clearly and unambiguously: without it, your reader will not know what point you are trying to make or why you are offering us textual examples.

Unclear link to thesis. The **focus of this discussion is unclear** because you're not making it clear *how* exactly this line of argument is connected to your thesis. You need to – otherwise, it looks like idle observation or blank summary description of the text, neither of which you want at the head of your analysis paragraph. Link us back to your thesis by telling us how this idea is connected to it – don't assume we'll connect the dots on our own. Never let your textual discussion stand on its own, expecting your reader to somehow divine what your points are or how they're connected to your larger thesis arguments. You must explain this to us. It's either that or risk appearing to simply be summarizing the story for us or commenting on it, neither of which belongs in a close textual analysis.

PARAGRAPH MIDDLES

Summary vs Analysis: Extend your paragraph discussion(s) *beyond* summary description of the text. Link this description back to your thesis and topic ideas by extending your discussion into textual examination of language and literary device. This is better than leaving us with a foreshortened discussion of the work that appears mostly as plot summary and character profile for its own sake rather than close analysis that seeks answers about strategy and form. Lean less heavily on extended description that walks us through a summary retelling of the story and instead "cherry pick" the text, using only isolated passages around which you enfold deep assessment and explanation of what and why you've selected that bit of text as exemplary material for your topic and thesis work. Don't mistake summary description for analysis – they're not the same thing. Take your observations further and hypothesize about what you think the author is doing here and why – how does this textual moment serve the aims of the narrative as a whole (or not)? Keep your focus on how and why the writer writes, not on what he/she writes. I want to know what you think about *how and how well the writing communicates its ideas*, no matter what those ideas are. Evaluate the writing, not the meaning or the ideas.

Overuse of the text. Please follow the **75/25 rule** - There is too much textual reference in this paragraph and not enough of your own writing and analysis. 75% of body paragraph material should be your own writing while 25% (*maximum*) may be quoted or paraphrased source material. Always support your conclusions by pointing to the text for brief examples, but never allow those examples to overtake your paragraph or do the talking for you. Your own good ideas are too important to be replaced by those of the text.

Please pay much closer attention to your paragraph construction, particularly your analysis and closing transition work. Beginning, filling, and/or ending analytical paragraph discussions with simple textual summary and description is insufficient for the kind of close, thesis-driven textual analysis of form and strategy you should be practicing in your paragraph discussions for this class. Body paragraphs *always* require an idea statement before any summary description or source lead-in information is provided, and then they must always develop and close by extending and referring back to that topic argument (and the thesis its derived from) before transitioning us into the next paragraph discussion. Always begin and end with your textual/analytical *idea* statements, not simple summary work for its own sake.

PARAGRAPH CLOSINGS

Underdeveloped conclusion. We need more discussion work here than this, and less simple summary that repeats what you've already made clear above. Remember that your task is to make an argument about how the language works or doesn't work, not restate through blank description what's in the text. Push your synthesis further and deeper (without repeating what you've already said in your essay work). Try being more contemplative or speculative in an attempt to suggest new ways of reading the text or making conclusions about the author's work. Suggest additional directions for study given what you've already told us. Anticipate and counter opposition to your conclusions. Stay away from comments on theme and topic. Refocus us on what we need to know about the effectiveness of this or these pieces *at the level of language and communication, **not** idea*.

Don't close with summary. Resist the urge to simply summarize the ideas at the close of paragraph discussions, as that is not textual analysis but simply reinterpreting the ideas in the text for us, which is not the assignment and not at all what I'm looking for in your analysis work. Stay with a close critical analysis of *the language in the work, not the ideas*. Don't summarize the text. Pick an aspect of the writing itself and explain why it does (not) succeed in helping the author convey meaning to us. Evaluate the writing, not the thematic content.

Closing discussion: Unclear link to thesis. It's unclear how this discussion and/or point(s) is related to your thesis or to the paragraph topic, and because that link remains unexplained the paragraph/point becomes summary description rather than clear and specific development of your thesis/topic arguments. Try not to build and close body paragraph discussions with simple summary description of the writing: you do not want your readers to guess how your points are connected to your paragraph topic (if you've given us one) and thesis argument. Offer an evaluation of *how (in)effective the writing is based on your analysis of it above* that clearly ties us back to your thesis proposition. We need to be constantly reminded how and why your paragraph discussions are connected to the larger arguments you're making about the text, the ones that define the thesis and the essay as a whole.
(These synthesizing statements also often function quite well as transitions to the next piece of your discussion.)