Analysis

One of the most common requirements of any college essay is **analysis**. In most cases it is used as a catchall word to tell the student they will have to engage with a complex topic to develop an argument or discuss the topic in detail. Analysis, therefore, appears to be a fairly simple requirement to check off when completing an assignment, but a common issue across all disciplines is "poor" or "shallow" analysis. This handout will explain what traits make "good" analysis and how to incorporate it into your own writing.

What *is* Analysis?

Analysis as defined by the Merriam Webster Dictionary is "a detailed examination of anything complex in order to understand its nature or to determine its essential features." In the case of writing, analysis often comes down to arguments or explanations you make in favor of your thesis or hypothesis. Think of it as the result of providing examples, explaining them, and then **connecting them back to your thesis statement via interpretation**. Analysis is not just providing the facts but explaining them and saying why they are important and what effect they have on the subject matter. For example:

> **Claim**
> *Jane Eyre* quickly captures the empathy of the reader within its first few chapters by detailing the life and tribulations of Jane herself.

> **Analysis**
> Jane's introduction informs the reader of her outside position as other within Gateshead hall in the introduction of *Jane Eyre* with her Aunt stating she could only join her and the other children by the fireside if she were a "contented, happy little [child]" (Bronte 7). **This isolation of Jane prompts the reader to understand her as alienated within the family, which then acts as the emotional anchor to contextualize Jane around. This impression of alienation and vulnerability is built upon through first person narration to directly reveal Jane's thoughts and feelings about her current situation and invite the reader into Jane's perspective to understand the events and characters of the story as she does. This combination of a quick introduction to the emotional theme which runs through all the plot of Gateshead hall and the intimate perspective which Jane provides allows the reader to settle into the necessary mindset to accept the bounded strategic empathy which Charlotte Bronte prompts.**

In the above example we see analysis at work. For reference, we've included the paper's central claim (thesis) so that you can see how the analysis in the example paragraph links back to the claim. The example paragraph begins with a brief underlined section which gives context to the situation that will be analyzed. In this case, the context includes a specific example of the "life and tribulations" mentioned in the central claim. The **bolded** section of the paragraph is the analysis, which uses the context from the underlined section to interpret a specific situation in the novel to prove the original claim. By "interpret," we mean that the writer is explaining what they think this interaction between Jane and her aunt means and why they think it's important.

Summary or Analysis?

One issue with incorporating analysis into a paper is confusing it with summary. Summary is necessary for completing an analysis, but it is not a substitute for it. As shown in the earlier example, the <u>underlined</u> section is a summary, and its purpose is to provide the necessary context to then interpret the writer's analysis. Here are some key distinctions between summary and analysis:

Summary
- Provides important information to the reader so they can enter the conversation.
- Is neutral--summaries never include the writer's argument, opinions, interpretations, they just report the main points or key context of another piece of writing.
- Assists analysis by providing the readers with the context they need to understand the reasons or logic for the writer's interpretation.

Analysis
- Uses summary as a starting point for you to then explain or interpret.
- Connects back to your thesis in support of its claim.

Conclusion

Analysis is an important aspect to any paper, and with a little practice, can become an automatic process when writing. The important thing to remember about analysis is that it always explains something whether it is the summary which came before it or the thesis back at the beginning of the paper. Hopefully this guide has given you a better understanding of what analysis is and how to use the tool to better your own papers.