Introduction to Analysis

In writing, analysis is used two ways: first, usually you analyze (study, examine, investigate) a primary text and develop a thesis on which your paper is centered; second, you gather evidence from the text (and from secondary sources if you're writing a research paper) and analyze it within your paper to demonstrate the plausibility of your main claim, the thesis.

When developing a thesis, you need to analyze your text/source by examining every part of it to determine which parts are relevant to your topic.

For example, let's say you've analyzed Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part I* and you've come up with a thesis about the power dynamics between Falstaff, King Henry IV, and Prince Hal. When you're doing research, it is important to include only relevant arguments from academic articles [secondary sources]. Ellen Caldwell’s article, “‘Banish All the Wor(l)d’: Falstaff’s Iconoclastic Threat to Kingship in Henry IV,” includes two separate arguments about Falstaff's power in relation to the royal family and Falstaff's historical significance. When analyzing this article, you should discern that Falstaff's historical significance is not relevant information to include in a research paper about power dynamics.

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. You present the evidence (usually in the form of quotations from a text or from a scholarly article) and explain it, showing how it develops your point.

For example, if you use a quote from the shirt scene in *The Great Gatsby* to show that Gatsby is pathetic, your analysis might point out that his shirts are too colorful, that someone else buys them for him, and that he thinks Daisy will be impressed even though she's married to a man who can buy all the fine shirts he wants.

What Analysis is Not

*Analysis is not a summary of other people’s ideas: When you are writing a paper, your analysis cannot simply recount what someone else has said. You can use another person’s ideas to support an argument, but your analysis should be your interpretation of your evidence and sources.

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 their own interpretation of the book, but rather takes Holmes’ argument and presents it as their own.

*Analysis is not plot summary: Writers often include data, quotations or plot summaries in a
paper without analyzing them because they seem self-evident. Students tell themselves that they do not need to explain the quotation or plot summary because it explains itself. However, when writers do this, they are making two assumptions: first, they assume that there is only one way in which the data, quotation, or plot summary can be interpreted, and second, they assume that the reader thinks the same way.

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 naivete. 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 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 concrete evidence, the reader has no 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 his family to be white not Indian.”

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

*Analysis does not prove a claim; instead, it tries to show why that claim is plausible: When writers interpret texts/sources, they should keep in mind that theirs 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. Therefore, writers should think of their papers as valid, arguable interpretations, but not as definitive or incontrovertible.

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." Sara might hate 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 sources you are working with. When developing an argument, here are a few questions you should consider:
1. What does this data or source say about the work I am examining?
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?*

To recap, after writers have developed their thesis, they use evidence and analysis to support it. Analysis shows 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 shows without oversimplifying its meaning.

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

Analysis should not be:
*A distortion of evidence that forces it to support your conclusion or argument.

*Differentiating Between Evidence and Analysis*

Many writers struggle 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 illustrates and/or supports points in an argument, whereas analysis is the writer’s interpretation or explanation of the evidence.

For instance, evidence might show that a story’s character does not like to read. Analysis of this story might explain the significance of the character’s dislike of reading.

Here are questions analysis might address:
1. Why is it important to the story that this character does not like to read?
2. What does this aspect of the character say about the character or the meaning of the story as a whole?