**Analysis vs. Summary**

ANALYSIS is examination, evaluation, dissection, interpretation, original opinion, reading

between the lines, connecting to other knowledge, etc. It is the goal of most expository

essays. The analyzer starts with a quotation or question and uses it to show his/her

understating and interpretation.

SUMMARY is recapitulation, review, retelling a story or scene without original thoughts or

interpretations. Summary is not the goal of expository essays. It is usually easier than

analysis because it requires less thought. Assume that the reader of your essay knows the

story and needs just the slightest reminder.

Strive for 2/3 interpretation and

1/3 summary in your expository writing.

Here is an example of summary (to be avoided) and analysis (to be practiced):

Quotation:

As Gatsby is driving Nick to lunch, he notices a change in his manner; “We hadn’t

reached West Egg Village before Gatsby began leaving his elegant sentences

unfinished and slapping himself indecisively on the knee of his caramel-colored suit.

‘Look here, old sport,’ he broke out surprisingly. What’s your opinion of me

anyhow?’”(69).

Summary: Nick is riding with Gatsby to lunch. He notices that Gatsby is speaking

differently, leaving his sentences unfinished. Gatsby asks Nick what he thinks of him.

(Notice that there is no opinion or interpretation in this statement. It adds nothing to our understanding

of the passage.)

Analysis: In this scene, we see a break in Gatsby’s affected calm. Nick had noticed

previously that he “pick[ed] his words with care”(53); now he leaves sentences

unfinished. His agitation is seen also in his physical movements, as he “slap[s]

himself indecisively on the knee”(69). Gatsby is making plans to meet Daisy again,

and his change in manner is brought on by his nervousness about seeing her. Gatby’s

insecurity about what Daisy might think of him after all these years leads him to ask

Nick for his opinion of him, a fact which surprises Nick because it is such a change

from Gatsby’s usual aloof confidence. In fact, Gatsby is so rattled as he draws near

the critical moment in achieving his dream that he is unable even to be direct with

Nick. Instead of just asking him if Nick would plan a meeting, he arranges for “Miss

Baker [to] speak to [him] about this matter”(72). This is a crucial moment in

Gatsby’s life, and its weight is illustrated in his unusual behavior.

(Notice that the writer has used the passage to illustrate important changes in the character. The writer

uses specific examples and ties the passage to other moments in the book.)

<http://dept.lamar.edu/writingcenter/pdf/summary%20vs%20analysis.pdf>