Helpful Hints for Writers
Summary, Analysis, and Evaluation

*College-level assignments often call for you to summarize, analyze or evaluate. This handout will help you understand how to understand the difference between those styles.*

To be a successful writer, you need to understand the difference between summary, analysis, and evaluation. Unfortunately, most of us are more comfortable simply summarizing. While there is certainly a time and place for summary, analysis and evaluation require a high level of thinking imperative for success in an academic environment and in the outside world.

A summary is a brief statement of the main points of something.

An analysis is an examination of the elements or structure of something, as a basis for discussion or interpretation.

An evaluation is your conclusion about a source, based on evidence as to what you hold to be most important or effective.

**To summarize:** Answer the questions: What are the main points? What happens? Who are the people? Where does it happen?

**To analyze:** Use the summary to answer “Why?” or “How?”

- How is the author getting the message across? How does the author use rhetorical devices or language to convey it?
- How might the author’s biases influence the work?
- How and why is evidence used to support assertions?
- How and why are citations used from other authorities?
- How does the author use opposing views?
- How does the author use organization to structure ideas?

**To evaluate:** Use your summary and analysis to answer “so what?” or “what's my point?” or “what is my opinion?”

- Consider strengths and weaknesses of the work. Do you agree?
- After looking at the author's evidence, what is your conclusion?
- Will the author's argument affect the future? If so, how?
- If you were writing the text, what would you have recommended?

### How do I know if I'm summarizing or analyzing?

If you're answering “yes” to the following questions, you're probably summarizing:

- Am I stating something that would be obvious to a reader or viewer?
- Does my essay move through the plot or author's argument in the same order the author used?
- Am I simply describing what happens, where it happens, or whom it happens to?

If you're answering “yes” to the following questions, you're probably analyzing or evaluating:

- Am I making an original argument about the text?
- Have I arranged my evidence around my own points, rather than just following the order in the text?
- Am I explaining why or how an aspect of the text is significant?

**Example:** In the following excerpts from a review of the film American Hustle by Christy Lemire, summary, analysis, and evaluation are all used.

**Summary:** “Co-written with Eric Singer, Russell's latest is based on the Abscam sting operation of the late '70s and early '80s, in which a con artist helped the FBI catch members of Congress taking bribes. 'Some of this actually happened,' a title card playfully informs us at the film's start, before Russell introduces us to the glorious sight of Bale's paunchy Irving Rosenfeld plastering a horrendous hairpiece onto his shiny dome.”

**Analysis:** “The unreliable narration and urgent zooms, the 1970s milieu of flashily dressed scammers and mobsters, the carefully chosen pop songs underscoring key emotional moments…”

**Evaluation:** “…all those recognizably Scorsesean signatures are there, yet Russell infuses them with his unique brand of insanity… David O. Russell out-Scorseses Martin Scorsese with 'American Hustle,' a '70s crime romp that's ridiculously entertaining in all the best ways. ‘American Hustle’ is actually a more thrilling and satisfying experience than Scorsese's latest, the upcoming ‘The Wolf of Wall Street,’ which similarly inspired by the true story of an irrepressible financial huckster.


http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/american-hustle-2013