

## 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 90% interpretation and  
10% 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. Gatsby’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.)*