

SUMMARY VERSUS ANALYSIS

Perhaps the most common writing problem in approach or content that first-year college students face is differentiating summary from analysis. High school papers are typically *summaries of information* (a recitation of facts and figures on a very superficial level) or *summaries of literary content* (your typical book report). In college, professors expect papers to include but move beyond simple summaries and to provide *analysis*. Analysis is complex thinking about a subject that requires comprehensive understanding, critical thinking, and independence of perspective. This means more than giving your opinion. Analysis provides an evaluation and assessment of information backed by substantive arguments and direct proof. It also indicates the significance of a given topic, question, or argument, even beyond the scope of an individual paper. In short, summary answers the “who/what/where/when” questions and analysis answers “why?”

Below is a scenario approached by summary versus analysis so that you can get a clearer sense of what makes them different.

Example: Yankees @ Red Sox

Summary

- Play-by-play overview of game
- statistical summary of game
- reiteration of highlights / key plays
- recitation of basic information about the game

Last night, the Red Sox came from a two-run deficit in the sixth inning to beat the Yankees 10-4. The win forces a game six in New York, which will be played Wednesday night. The Red Sox took the early lead in the first inning, but then fell behind in the sixth when pitcher Curt Schilling gave up a triple to Yankee shortstop Derek Jeter, which drove in three runs. Schilling then walked Yankee third baseman Alex Rodriguez, but managed to end the inning with the Yankees leading 4-2. Schilling left the game at that point with a pitch count of 94, including 4 walks and 4 strikeouts. During the seventh inning, the Red Sox bats came alive, with David Ortiz starting the rally that eventually drove in three runs, giving the Red Sox a 5-4 lead. The Red Sox clinched the victory in the eighth inning, scoring five more runs, to which the Yankees did not respond in the ninth. This win gave the Red Sox a secure lead over the Yankees as they try to clinch their division and a postseason bid.

Analysis

- assessment of the game from a specific perspective (e.g., compared to rest of series)
- evaluation of players, plays, coaching, etc.
- presentation of an argument, opinion, or some other “take” about significance of game that goes beyond the final score

Last night, the Red Sox proved that they still have some of last year’s magic as they head into September and the postseason. Their come-from-behind win over the Yankees was reminiscent of last year’s ALCS, when the Sox came back to take the series in seven games. Their season-long command of the AL East lead many to speculate that the Red Sox are positioned to win back-to-back World Series championships, something that’s only been accomplished four times in league history. Despite inconsistent pitching and batting, the Red Sox continue to find ways to win. Last night, Schilling battled through the first six innings, working through the sixth and closing out the inning with his team down by only two runs. The Red Sox bull pen shut down its perpetual critics by coming through in the clutch, holding the Yankees to four runs and setting up a great opportunity for an offensive strike to put the game away. David Ortiz, the 12th inning hero of last year’s ALCS game four, reprised his role as hero in the seventh with a solo home run. Two more homeruns by Jason Varitek and Bill Mueller sealed the deal. The hot bats continued in the eighth, earning five more runs to give the Sox a comfortable lead. The combination of rejuvenated starting pitching, a more reliable bull pen, and team-wide good hitting will help the Sox clinch their division championship. It is also the recipe that will spell defeat for their postseason opponents.