

The Difference Between Plot Summary and Analysis

A summary is the brief description of the plot of literature. In a summary, you will tell your reader what the story is about.

Contrarily, an analysis of literature usually dissects one aspect of the piece and explains how it affects the whole. An analysis assumes that the reader is already familiar with the plot or is written such that the plot is irrelevant to the reader's understanding of the analysis.

"Analysis is about breaking something into its pieces to learn how its pieces fit together into a whole.

To learn about and prevent diseases, doctors analyze bodies, looking at organs and bodily functions: They analyze the skeletal and muscular systems, the organs of digestion and sight, and the cellular processes of those different systems and organs. Once doctors understand how these different parts fit together, they can start questioning how a change in one part affects the other parts, how (for example) a disease of the liver affect stomach functioning."

Compare *The DK Handbook's* analogy of the doctors to an analysis of literature performed by a university student. Your literary analysis should study one of the "organs" or "systems" in the literature (e.g. tone, imagery, symbolism) in order to better understand the piece as a whole and be able to see, for example, how the imagery affects the other aspects of the work.

Side by Side Comparisons of Summary and Analysis

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

Summary	Analysis
<i>Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone is about a young boy who finds out he is a wizard. He then goes to a special school, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, to learn magic.</i>	<i>In Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry symbolizes the human desire for someplace to learn all the fanciful things that cannot exist.</i>

"The Necklace"

Summary	Analysis
<i>The major extenuating detail about Mathilde is that she seems to be isolated, locked away from other people. She and her husband do not talk to each other much, except about external things. He speaks about his liking for boiled beef, and she states that she cannot accept the party invitation because she has no nice dresses. Once she gets the dress she complains because she has no jewelry. Even when borrowing the necklace from Jeanne Forrestier, she does not say much. When she and her husband discover that the necklace is lost, they simply go over the details, and Loisel dictates a letter of explanation, which she writes in her own hand. Even when she meets Jeanne on the Champs-Elysees, she does not say a great deal about her life but only goes through enough details about the loss and replacement of the necklace to make Jeanne exclaim about the needlessness of the ten-year sacrifice.</i>	<i>The major flaw of Mathilde's character is that she is withdrawn and uncommunicative, apparently unwilling or unable to form an intimate relationship. For example, she and her husband do not talk to each other much, except about external things such as his taste for boiled beef and her lack of a party dress and jewelry. With such an uncommunicative marriage, one might suppose that she would be more open with her close friend, Jeanne Forrestier, but Mathilde does not say much even to her. This flaw hurts her greatly, because if she were more open she might have explained the loss and avoided the horrible sacrifice. This lack of openness, along with her self-indulgent dreaminess, is her biggest defect.</i> <i>--E.V. Roberts and H. E. Jacobs (1998)</i>
