



Citing Textual Evidence to Support Analysis

Lesson Transcript

In this lesson, we're going to learn how to analyze a text and cite evidence to support an analysis. We'll also learn the difference between quotations, paraphrases, and summaries, and we'll talk about how to give credit where credit is due.

Analyzing a Text

You gulp as you look over your English assignment. Your teacher has given you a short article about recycling and told you to analyze the text in a paragraph or two, being sure to cite textual evidence to support your analysis. Yikes! How are you supposed to do all that? You wonder if you can go hide under the bed now. Never fear! This lesson will show you exactly how to do such an assignment.

First things first. What does it mean to **analyze** a text? Analyzing a text simply means identifying its component parts. When you analyze a text, you break it down, picking out the author's main idea, the reasons that support the main idea, and the evidence that supports the reasons. Then you usually offer your own opinion about whether the text is convincing and does what the author intends it to do.

In your recycling article, the author's main point is that the city council should provide funding for a new recycling center in your area. He gives several reasons why he thinks this is a good idea: the old center is outdated, people aren't currently recycling because it's inconvenient, the landfill is receiving extra waste that could be recycled, and the benefits of a new center would outweigh the costs in the long run. The author also provides a collection of evidence to support his reasons, including statistics about recycling, stories from employees and users of the old center, and a description of the landfill.

Textual Evidence

'Okay,' you think, 'this isn't so hard. But what does the teacher mean about citing textual evidence?' Let's answer that question next.

Textual evidence is support for your analysis that comes directly from the text itself. When you analyze a text, you want your readers to know what the author actually says rather than merely your interpretation of the author's ideas. This means that you quote, paraphrase, and/or

summarize the author's words to support your points.

- In a quotation, you repeat an author's idea word for word and surround it by quotation marks.
- In a paraphrase, you rewrite the author's idea in your own words, keeping your rewrite about the same length as the original.
- In a summary, you condense the author's idea in your own words.

In your analysis of the recycling article, you might directly quote the author's main point: 'This city deserves a brand new recycling center that can take waste management into the future, and the city council needs to throw itself behind the project financially.' Then you can paraphrase his reasons, like we did earlier. Finally, you might summarize his evidence, explaining how the old center's equipment breaks down all the time and how it's hard to get to and not open on the weekends and briefly noting statistics about how many recyclables end up in the landfill and how much money the city would save if it had a more efficient recycling center.

Giving Credit Where Credit Is Due

Whenever you use quotations, paraphrases, and summaries, you must be sure to give credit where credit is due. After all, these aren't your ideas; they're the author's ideas.

There are many systems for giving credit, or citing sources, including MLA, Chicago/Turabian, and APA. These systems provide specific rules and methods that help you gather and properly use all the elements you need to cite a source, like the author's name, the source's title, publisher, place of publication, year of publication, page numbers, etc. You'll learn about these as time goes on, but the most important thing to know right now is that you must identify ideas that aren't your own. If you don't, you could be guilty of **plagiarism**, which is passing off someone else's ideas as your own. This is a very serious academic offense that could get you a failing grade or worse.

In your recycling article analysis, giving the author credit is pretty simple. For the main point quotation, indicate that the author said it directly and then put the page number of the quote in parentheses behind it. For the paraphrases, you could write something like, 'The author gives the following reasons to support his main point...' and then cite a page number after the reasons. Follow a similar process as you summarize the author's evidence. Just be sure to always give credit where credit is due.

Your Opinion

The last step in analyzing a text is to offer your opinion of it. Did the author's argument convince you? Did he do a good job of presenting his reasons and evidence? Do you now support a new recycling center? Why or why not?

Let's say that the author has convinced you, and you now think that your city needs a new recycling center. You say so in your analysis, but you can't stop there. You must also say why you are convinced. Return to the article to pick out your reasons. Perhaps you were struck by the stories of

broken-down equipment at the old center. Maybe you found the statistics of how much recyclable material ends up in the landfill particularly powerful. Perhaps you were satisfied by the author's financial projections for the future. Then be sure to say so! Your ideas are important, too. When we read, we both learn about other people's ideas and form our own ideas in response. Reading is really a conversation.

Lesson Summary

Let's review. To **analyze** a text, you must identify its component parts, including the main idea, reasons, and evidence. To support your analysis, you must cite **textual evidence**, which you draw directly from the text itself.

Textual evidence appears in the forms of quotations, taking an author's ideas word for word from the text; paraphrases, rewriting the author's ideas in your own words in about the same length; and summaries, condensing the author's ideas in your own words. You must always be sure to give the author credit whenever you quote, paraphrase, or summarize his or her ideas.

Finally, when you analyze a text, you must also offer your own opinions about how successful the text is. Explain why the text convinced you, or why it didn't, and give some specific reasons for your opinion.

Congratulations! You've just analyzed your first text. It feels pretty good, doesn't it?

Learning Outcomes

As this video concludes, you should have the ability to:

- Describe what is meant by analyzing a text
- Identify examples of textual evidence
- Discuss the importance of citing text properly
- Define plagiarism