

Anthropology and the Writing Process: Summary & Description vs. Analysis & Argument

Summary: tells what is happening; summarizes events or facts; describes a practice or interaction in general terms

Ex: Nisbett and Cohen (1996) claim that herding economies all over the world and men living in the American South tend to be associated with concerns about honor and a readiness to commit violence in order to defend it.

Description: may take note of particular statements, practices, or details, but makes no argumentative comment on those pieces of evidence

Ex: Young men in herding cultures spend most of their days alone, directing their herds to food and water and protecting them from predators and thieves. Livelihoods depend on livestock, and even a single cow is worth defending. A single cow is also highly transportable, easy to steal, and quickly hidden or sold.

What is missing? --any ANALYSIS of HOW this evidence functions in support of your argument, and WHY it might be important for understanding the causes and effects of these practices, beliefs, or interactions.

Analysis: asks and answers how the evidence functions to support or demonstrate your argument

Ex: Herdsmen display great aggressiveness and violence because of their vulnerability to losing their animals. In order to survive, a herder must show that he is capable of defending himself and his herd against transgression. By appearing strong and unwilling to tolerate an insult or challenge, a herd owner may be able to deter potential thieves.

Argument: uses analytical points to make an arguable claim about the culture, practice, belief, phenomenon, conversation, etc. as a whole

Ex: Young southern men respond to insults or challenges with a flash of anger and excessive violence like herders do, but the authors provide only indirect evidence for the cause of this similarity. Scottish and Irish herders may have colonized the American south 400 years ago, but it is not clear why the subsequent economic and political development of the area parallels the pressures of extant herding communities to converge on a culture of honor.