**Summary, Analysis, and Exegesis**

In your papers you shouldn’t simply drop in quotations and expect their significance and relevance to your argument to be self-evident. You need to provide sufficient analysis of the passage you’re referring to and show it supports your understanding of its meaning (i.e., how quotations support your interpretation of them and the author’s ideas)

**Basic Terminology**

A paraphrase restates the content in a slightly different manner (often less precise than the original). Although it can be useful to put an idea into your own words, typically a paraphrase functions as a summary; it doesn’t attempt to explain but simply reiterates the original text.

An analysis shows how the text is constructed by breaking the argument down into its component parts. In a philosophical essay, the primary task of an analysis is to clarify the text’s claims and show how they are supported. The analysis is not an end in itself but rather a process that demonstrates your *understanding* of the text. It might be useful to imagine the following: suppose you are asked to explain a text to someone who is unfamiliar with it. What would this person need to know? What’s most likely to be difficult to understand? How are the ideas connected?

An exegesis is a more sophisticated level of engagement with the text. It combines analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of the main ideas. An exegesis gives an interpretation of the text, and supports that interpretation by showing how it illuminates what would otherwise remain obscure or puzzling inthe original. Here how elaborate on what’s important and significant and why it is.

**Example and Exercise**



A poor summary

“Descartes says he thought he was right before but now he knows he was not. Then he says he must raze everything. Then he says it’s an enormous task and he had other things to do. Then he says he won’t procrastinate anymore. Then he says that today he will demolish all his opinions.”

A more usable summary

“Because what is false might appear to be true, Descartes decides to radically question all his beliefs from their foundations in order to establish some enduring knowledge in the sciences.”

What would help turn the second, usable summary into an analysis?

1) Indicate 1 or 2 terms from Descartes’ text that should be explained (i.e., do not state a dictionary entry but explain what Descartes means by them *in this context*).

The words “doubtful” and “firm” are important to Descartes’ methods. He calls thoughts doubtful which he cannot fully put his faith into or does not completely believe, and he calls thoughts firm which are based only on what he knows to be true.

2) Underline or Circle words that are logical connectors or sign posts about the argument (e.g., thus, but, therefore, for this reason, accordingly, in addition, consequently, etc.). Then identify and indicate which sentence expresses the main claim.

“And thus I realized that once in my life I had to raze everything to the ground and begin again from the original foundations, if I wanted to establish anything firm and lasting in the sciences.”

3) How is this main claim supported?

This claim is supported by his earlier assertion that many of the things many of his opinions which he developed earlier in his youth were incorrect, and therefore much of his knowledge now has unstable foundations.

4) Name at least one assumption (i.e., an unstated belief) that Descartes (and his reader) must assume in order for his claims to make sense.

Descartes assumes that the only way fix his misassumptions is by starting from nothing and reconstructing his knowledge, instead of slowly fixing them one by one. He also assumes the reader knows what he means by a “doubtful” opinion is and why he cannot establish anything firm in the sciences with such opinions.

Now write a paragraph analyzing this text. Attach your paragraph to this handout and turn both in on Tuesday.

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Descartes Writing Assignment

In his first meditation, Descartes discusses the course of action he deems necessary to correct all the falsehoods he has previously accepted to be true. He states that “I realized that once in my life I had to raze everything to the ground and begin again from the original foundations, if I wanted to establish anything firm and lasting in the sciences” which is one of the most important aspects of his methods. Unlike many philosophers before him who systematically pondered truths from subject to subject, he takes a very mathematical approach to arriving at the truth, in that there are some inherent axiomatic truths from which he can then deduce all other truths. This is important to note, because it much of the logic in his methods is very similar to, or even based off of, this decision.