

How to show evidence of critical or analytical interpretation of a short story

Before you begin

What you need:

Related text: **"Powder" by Tobias Wolff**

Approximate time this exercise should take you: **30 minutes**

Reminder

Now you are ready to present an insightful and sensible analysis of the text. Because you should now have a strong understanding of the text, you should be able to provide a critical and analytical written interpretation of the text. One of the mistakes many students make in this objective is writing a plot or text summary rather than an analysis of the text.

Instructions

In the exercise below you will find five paragraphs, each summarizing a part of the plot of the story. Your task is to transform the summary into an analytical paragraph that discusses the significance of the passage. Refer to the **Answer key** below for possible responses. Compare your own response to the suggested response for tone and content.

Exercise

Summary 1

At the beginning of the story it is just before Christmas when the son in the story goes on a skiing holiday with his father. We know the mother is unsure whether this is a good idea because the father once sneaked the narrator into a night club to see Thelonious Monk.

Summary 2

The father decides that it is absolutely necessary that he and his son experience one last ski run, even though they have already checked out of the lodge where they were staying. One run turns into several and then a snowstorm hits. They still continue to ski.

Summary 3

The son sticks to his father like “white on rice” and safely makes it to the bottom of the hill. After returning their skis to the ski rental shop, the father puts chains on his Austin-Healey, a sure sign that the drive home will be a hard one. All the son can think of is the Christmas table awaiting him at home.

Summary 4

Both father and son stop for a bite to eat because the father, in particular, is hungry. The dad also makes a phone call, and the narrator assumes he is calling the mother. The father sips his coffee and looks out the window.

Summary 5

The son in the story finally resigns himself to the fact that they will get caught after driving on the closed road. He then decides to stop moping and enjoy himself. He even realizes at the end of the story that “if you haven’t driven fresh powder, you haven’t driven.”

Answer key

Your explanations may vary slightly from those below.

Summary 1 – CRITICAL AND ANALYTICAL VERSION

One of the first details the reader notices in the introduction to the story is the fact that it is Christmas Eve and that the father in the story has promised to get his son home in time for dinner. Ironically, this family time will be interrupted by the conflict between the husband and wife. The tension between them is further developed when the reader discovers that the couple have separated and the wife/mother doubts the father's sense of responsibility, especially since during an earlier outing, the father sneaked their son into a night club. This conflict continues throughout the story.

Summary 2 – CRITICAL AND ANALYTICAL VERSION

When despite the commitment he has made to bring his son home in time for Christmas Eve dinner, the father decides to take a few more ski runs after checking out of the ski lodge, the reader understands that the father is willing to take risks.

Summary 3 – CRITICAL AND ANALYTICAL VERSION

The narrator is clearly cautious and insecure in the company of his father, someone who exhibits the opposite characteristics. The contrast between the father preparing to drive home in stormy conditions and the comforts of home the son is imagining illustrates the son's need for security and the father's drive for adventure.

Summary 4 – CRITICAL AND ANALYTICAL VERSION

When the father pretends to make a phone call to his (ex) wife, we can presume he is attempting to show his son he is being responsible, yet ironically, he is also awaiting the departure of the state trooper so he and his son can sneak through the barrier blocking the closed road. This shows his daring and spontaneous nature.

Summary 5 – CRITICAL AND ANALYTICAL VERSION

When the son comes to the sudden realization that his father is in complete control of the situation, he enjoys the rest of the trip driving with his father. He discovers he can trust his father's actions and enjoy their experience together without worry. This is a huge milestone in new-found appreciation for accepting his father and his life circumstances as they are.