Consider this original text:

Scientists analyzing data collected by three spacecraft have discovered that there may be a fair amount of water — or hydroxyl, which is one hydrogen atom short of being water — on the Moon, albeit spread out in millimeter-thin layers on or near the surface. This will take some re-imagining, especially after those pictures from the Apollo missions that showed a spectacularly dry, dusty and oasis-free place. It is also a place where temperature swings are extreme, which means it should be inhospitable to a volatile compound like water. These new findings suggest that there is water lurking not only in permanently shadowed craters near the lunar poles but also elsewhere on the lunar surface.


**Paraphrase:**

Lunar missions have revealed an extremely thin layer of hydroxyl (which is a cousin of water) on the moon. Our minds’ eyes will have to revise the picture we have of a desert-like lunar surface. On that surface, the extremes of temperature are not welcoming to water’s unstable nature. These findings suggest that the moon may yet reveal hidden caches of actual water.

**Summary:**

Recent scientific data collected on the moon, which reveal the presence of hydroxyl, will radically change our concept of the moon surface and suggest that we may someday discover stores of lunar water.

**Analysis:**

*Text-focused*

The authors of this piece are attempting to reconcile our scientific and commonplace assumptions of the moon as a waterless desert with recent findings. While they introduce the fact that hydroxyl, “which is one hydrogen atom short of being water,” has been found on the moon, they do not explain how hydroxyl equals possible water. This piece may likely have been written for a scientific audience that would understand that an atmosphere “inhospitable to a volatile compound like water” would most likely have hydroxyl only as a by-product of water mixed with such volatility. By assuming, however, that most of us have formed our opinion based on fifty-year old photos, the authors seem to be addressing a fairly mainstream audience that is unburdened by scientific knowledge.

*Content-focused*

These appear to be extremely important findings. Since life (at least as we know it) requires water, the presence of water on earth’s closest heavenly body could have far reaching implications for both astronomy and industry. Depending on what the authors mean by “a fair amount of water,” one could well-imagine a future race for resources on the moon. If we just take the example of agriculture, as one of many crucial human enterprises that require water, it is clear that these new scientific findings will spark the imaginations of our more visionary thinkers.
Analysis: Supporting an Argument about a Text with Evidence

The analytical essay is a common assignment across the disciplines. To analyze a piece (whether a book, an article, a piece of literature, or even a film), you must be able to (1) carefully summarize the information or opinions expressed in the text; (2) make an argument about your reading (or viewing) of the text; and (3) support your argument with specific evidence drawn from your close reading (or viewing) of the text.

Summarizing:
Your summary will likely be the shortest part of your essay. (Just as this is the shortest part of this handout!)

Making an argument:
You will need to take a position on the text—for example, whether the author’s position is sound or unsound, how the author’s position does or doesn’t respond to knowledge in the field, how the author’s arguments could be spun out into real-world applications, and so on.

Your argument should then take the shape of a thesis statement that explains to your readers what your position is and, ideally, also gives some idea of the kinds of evidence you’ll use to support this position.

Example argument (for a literature class):
In “Hills Like White Elephants,” Hemingway creates a feeling of restlessness and inertia.

Possible thesis statement:
In “Hills Like White Elephants,” Hemingway exposes the dark side of relationships—particularly their restlessness and inertia—by carefully restricting the action, dialogue, and narrative flow.

Supporting your argument with evidence:
All arguments must be supported with evidence. Traditionally we speak of three kinds of support: logical, emotional, and ethical. When writing argumentative essays, we are all often tempted to give our own reaction to what we’ve read, but this kind of emotional support is not necessarily convincing evidence for an argument about a text. Along the same lines, we often want to relate what we’ve read to our own lives—a kind of ethical support—but again this is not the best evidence to persuade your readers to believe an argument.

Logical support—evidence drawn from quotations and other objective sources—is the best evidence for the argument of an analytical paper. You must be able to both provide evidence from the text (quotations and paraphrases) to support your argument, and you must be able to explain the way in which the quoted or paraphrased passages act as support. Remember: quotations don’t “show” anything; you must show why/how the quotations logically support your argument. Merely rephrasing the quotation does not show that you understand its significance to your argument.