

Introduction to Synthesis



A synthesis essay is a written discussion that draws on more than one source. Your ability to write a synthesis essay depends on your ability to infer relationships among different sources – short stories, poems, essays, articles, novels, and also non-written sources, such as movies or documentaries.

This process is nothing new for you, since you infer relationships all the time - say, between something you've read in the newspaper and something you've seen for yourself, or between the teaching styles of your favourite and least favourite teachers.

Step 1: Read both sources. In this unit you will be comparing (or synthesizing) a short story with another source, often an article. As you read each piece, ask yourself, “What does the author want me to learn?”

Step 2: Read the synthesis topic several times to make sure you understand it. Go back to both sources and note the passages that deal with your essay topic. Look for textual evidence from BOTH sources. Prioritize your ideas.

Step 3: Always, always, outline your essay before you start to write. This gives your paper direction and purpose. Use the following guide:

Introduction:

- Your intro sets up the entire essay. It should be short and effective.
- It situates the reader and lets him/her know what to expect.
- Provides context: what works are you discussing? What are they about?
- The last sentence of your intro is the **thesis**: it specifically mentions both readings and outlines what BIG IDEA you will be addressing. You MUST have a thesis.

Body Paragraphs:

- The body of your essay is where you present your analysis of the topic question
- Each body paragraph should consist of:
 - o A strong topic sentence. A topic sentence is like a sign on a highway; it tells your reader where he/she is going.
 - o Fully developed points. Don't skip around. Discussing one or two points well is better than barely touching on six different points.
 - o Fully integrated quotes. See handout on integrated quotes.
 - o Transition words to guide your reader: furthermore, however, first, second, third, therefore, thus, as a result, consequently, etc.
 - o Concluding Sentence: Summarize. Remind your reader where he/she just went.

Conclusion:

- Use the conclusion to summarize the specifics of your essay
- Start by re-stating your thesis using different words.
- Don't introduce new points
- Why were your points important?
- What does your reader know now that he/she didn't know before?

Step 4: Edit. Read your essay out loud for sense and sound.

Ask yourself:

- o Did I avoid plot summary and focus on analysis and insight?
- o Did I connect the two sources?
- o Did I open each paragraph with a topic sentence? Close each paragraph with a concluding sentence?
- o Did I cite your quotes?
- o Was I concise? Take out repetitive words and phrases. "Padding" your essay is ineffective.
- o Did I consistently use the third person point of view?
- o Was I clear? Does each paragraph have a focus?

Step 5: Proofread!!!

- Check for spelling errors. In the era of spell check and online dictionaries, there is no excuse for misspelled words.
- Check for capitalization, punctuation, grammar.
- Make sure you haven't used abbreviations or instant messaging language.
- Remove any phrases such as, "I think..." or "This paper will discuss..." and never use, "In conclusion..."
- Circle weak vocabulary and use a thesaurus to improve.
- Check for missed words by reading aloud one last time.

Step 6: Submit.

