

## SYNTHESIZING SOURCES

When a writer synthesizes ideas, information, or sources, their goal is to show the connections among those items. In their classes, students are always being asked to synthesize information: to make connections between knowledge they have already learned with what they are learning in their current class. In academic writing, writers are often asked to synthesize sources: to show how the information or ideas presented in a set of sources are related.

It is very important to note that a synthesis is not a summary. A summary lists the main ideas of each text, while a synthesis discusses connections among a group of texts.

### STEPS FOR SYNTHESIZING SOURCES

Below are steps to help guide you as you write a synthesis. Please note that you might not follow these steps in precisely the order we have them written here; depending on your own writing process, you might do some of these steps simultaneously or you might move back and forth between them as you work.

#### STEP 1: READ AND PLAN

Carefully read the assignment guidelines to ensure that you understand the expectations and requirements for your writing task. Look for specific questions that you might need to answer about the texts as you synthesize them. Highlight or write those down so that you keep them in mind as you read.

As you read your sources, look for differences and similarities along the way. Try not take a position on your topic before you start reading so that you can be more observant as you go.

#### STEP 2: ORGANIZE YOUR IDEAS AND SOURCE MATERIAL

Track the topics or themes that each source discusses. Remember that you should have a topic or goal in mind, so you should not make observations about everything in those texts; instead, focus only on what is relevant to your topic.

You might use a synthesis matrix, which is shown below. This graphic organizer can help you identify and group similar ideas, which will help you build your paragraphs. Keep in mind you are building your paragraphs around each idea, not each source.

	Source #1	Source #2	Source #3
Main Idea A			
Main Idea B			
Main Idea C			

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### **STEP 3: DEFINE YOUR POSITION**

After reading and annotating your sources, define a position or make a claim about the topic based on your observations of the ideas and information in the sources. Using this position, you can create a thesis statement that states an arguable claim.

With your thesis statement in mind, review your notes and re-read your sources. Make sure you see connections between your sources and your claim, and pinpoint evidence from the sources you can use to support your claim.

### **STEP 4: DRAFT YOUR SYNTHESIS**

As you consider how you would like to structure your writing, do not lose sight of your claim, topics, and evidence. You will begin to organize your paragraphs by idea/topic, not by source; in other words, if you use the synthesis matrix, each paragraph would be organized by and include content from an individual row rather than from the columns.