

Summary, analysis, and synthesis are three **methods of critically engaging with sources**. While each method has a specific purpose and can function independently, all three work together in a larger paper—along with quotations and paraphrases—to integrate and discuss scholarly materials in a professional or academic context. This handout reviews general information about summary, analysis, and synthesis, but always write with your audience and guidelines in mind.

Note: Remember to cite your sources as you make use of summary, analysis, and synthesis.

Summary

A summary **condenses information** from a source, informing readers of the source's main points and arguments. Summaries should **accurately represent your sources** and avoid offering personal opinions or interpretations. Within a larger paper, summaries provide relevant context about your sources or topic in preparation for further discussion.

To write a summary, identify the most important information for your writing goals. While remaining accurate to the source, logically organize the information to present to the reader. The length and scope of a summary will vary depending on your context and purpose in writing it, but summaries should be concise.

Example: *Robin Hood* is a folk tale about a man who steals from the rich to give to the poor.

Analysis

An analysis **studies and interprets information** in a source to assign meaning beyond what is written. Rather than restating what the author of a source has said, analysis questions, explains, or categorizes information to **show the reader your perspective**. Effective analysis demonstrates critical thinking and justified reasoning for a claim or argument. Within a larger paper, your analysis interprets evidence for the reader in a way that connects back to your main argument or purpose.

To write an analysis, identify different elements of a source (theory, purpose, medium, etc.), then draw conclusions based on one or more of those elements. Answer potential questions about and determine the implications of the source. Analysis will differ depending on assignment or genre, but analysis may question the source's effectiveness, explore the source's implications, or expand on ideas that the source presents.

Example: In Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, the repetition of "I have a dream" links traditional ideas of the American dream with King's desires for an equitable country.

Synthesis

A synthesis **explores how different sources work together to create meaning** in a broader conversation about a topic. Rather than describing the topic, a synthesis **identifies what authors are saying** about the topic by connecting ideas and arguments across multiple sources to support a main argument or purpose. Within a larger paper, synthesis combines or compares sources to create a conversation around the topic. Synthesis can be objective or argumentative, depending on your purpose and context.

To write a synthesis, gather sources about a topic and identify patterns in their methodology and content. Then, write about the differences, similarities, and connections across your sources to describe what authors are saying about your topic. Be careful to avoid presenting a collection of summaries, analyses, or facts; your synthesis should expand on the existing conversation by connecting sources together.

Example: When choosing where to move, research indicates that people prioritize cost, opportunity, and location. Recent social science studies have suggested that people prefer to live closer to schools or work, while other scholarship has identified entertainment options as an important variable. In academic discussions about moving, cost of living and climate are often mentioned as part of location. While scholars note that people have different reasons and goals for moving, location is one of the most important parts of deciding where to live.

Note: When synthesizing sources, multiple citations will typically appear in the same in-text citation. Format according to citation and assignment guidelines.

Using These Methods Together

Although summary, analysis, and synthesis can function independently, they are often **used together to form an argument, make a statement, or support an idea** in larger papers or projects. Each method has a different purpose but can build on each other when combined. For example, summary and analysis can lead into synthesis, especially when examining a collection of sources about a given topic. After including a quotation, paraphrase, or summary, adding analysis and synthesis can help you to support your main argument or purpose.

To implement these methods together in a work, identify areas in your sources that help you to accomplish your writing goals. Build on those pieces of evidence to support your argument and strengthen your credibility. Try summarizing large works and sections, analyzing quotations and paraphrases, and synthesizing sources that share a topic or point of discussion. Critically engaging with sources using summary, analysis, and synthesis will help you to establish how you understand your sources and effectively convey information to your readers.

Example with summary and synthesis: Traditionally, *Robin Hood* is a folk tale about a man named Robin Hood who steals from the rich to give to the poor (summary). However, Robin Hood's motivations for doing so can differ depending on the story. In some portrayals, his goal is to redistribute wealth equally among the people, while in other versions, he protests the high taxes by stealing. Although his motivations and relationships may change across stories, Robin Hood is characterized by acting on his personal moral code (synthesis).

This example uses summary to give context for the conclusions drawn in the synthesis.

Example with quotation and analysis: In his "I Have a Dream" speech, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. describes his dream of freedom and equality for all as "deeply rooted in the American dream" (quotation). By establishing that his dream was grown from American patriotism and values, King positions freedom and equality as essential parts of the Civil Rights Movement (analysis).

This example uses a quotation as evidence, and the analysis forms the argument.