

Synthesis

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

A synthesis puts two or more arguments into conversation with each other, showing where they overlap and where they diverge. Some syntheses include your own ideas as a conclusion.

Preparation

Synthesis Question

Most syntheses are driven by a synthesis question, similar to a research question. The question should be open-ended and complex enough to allow for a variety of responses. An example is, "To what extent should the U.S. pursue nuclear power as an energy solution?". Your research question may change slightly as you gain a better sense of the academic conversation through your research.

Pre-writing

To get a sense of your topic, identify key terms in your synthesis question and conduct a database search, skimming a variety of article titles and abstracts, before you select your final sources. You may need to adjust or narrow your focus at this point. An example of an adjusted research question is, "To what extent should the U.S. develop nuclear reprocessing facilities to address our energy needs?".

Select arguments that address your research question but take different stances. Read and annotate them thoroughly.

Think about how the authors answer the synthesis question differently and what evidence they provide to support their arguments. Also consider what one author would say in response to the other. You may find it helpful to make a chart like the following to organize your thoughts:

Source	Main Argument	Key Terms	Evidence	Possible Counterarguments	My Reaction	Connections to Other Arguments

Organizing the Essay

Your essay will probably have three or four sections, including the introduction, analysis section, and synthesis section. Some syntheses will also include your own thoughts as a conclusion.

Introduction

Your introduction introduces the topic, question, and arguments to the reader. It generally includes three points:

- a statement of the research question or problem, stated as a question or a description
- short introductions to the articles (titles, authors, brief arguments)
- a thesis that answers the research question as the authors answer it

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Analysis section

Your analysis section **breaks down the arguments to show the reader their different pieces**. It lays the foundation for the synthesis section, so you will want to focus on the main ideas that you plan to return to later. This section shows “difference within similarity”—the authors address the same topic but present different stances.

- Write in-depth summaries of each of the articles, showing how their arguments and attitudes toward the question differ.
- Analyze the arguments by using rhetorical analysis and/or ideas critique, depending on your focus.
- Focus on points you want to later contrast in the synthesis section.

Synthesis section

Your synthesis section **puts the arguments back together in a new way**. To write your synthesis section, you will need to find a point of commonality between the arguments. This is their “similarity within difference”—their arguments differ, but they overlap in some areas. The connections may not be obvious at first; they may fall under minor points or implied ideas.

- One way to do this is to find a question that both parties agree on. For instance, one article might argue for nuclear reprocessing while the other argues against it, but they might agree that nuclear energy is one viable solution to our energy needs or that the U.S. needs to develop more domestic energy resources.
- Put the authors in conversation with each other. What would they say to each other?
- Ask yourself: what does reading one article demonstrate about the shortcomings of the second, and vice versa? What does one author fail to consider? How do you account for the authors’ differences in attitude or focus?
- What new understanding does reading both arguments together achieve?

Conclusion (sometimes optional, depending on assignment)

Your conclusion reflects on how your thinking on this subject has changed after writing the synthesis. Sometimes the synthesis section serves as a conclusion, and sometimes you will include a conclusion that shows your own addition to the academic conversation.

- What do you agree and disagree with and why?
- What points have both authors failed to take into account?
- How has your perception of the issue changed?
- What new questions have these arguments raised in your mind?
- How would you position yourself in regards to the authors and the topic?