

# How to Synthesize Multiple Sources

A synthesis, in the academic writing context, can be defined as a paper or project compiling multiple sources for the sake of proving an original thesis, claim, or idea. Synthesis writing assignments can be asked of students by professors at various levels of their collegiate experience.

## How is synthesizing different than summarizing?

Summarizing is the analysis of individual pieces of information, discussing their main points, and moving on to the next one. A synthesis is different in that you use the information you have to prove your claim or thesis by using multiple pieces of information from various sources, as well as your original ideas. A synthesis, therefore, seeks to advance the conversation. If summarizing is like a stack of blankets, synthesis is a quilt, combining multiple pieces from other blankets and fabric to make up the whole.

## What kind of assignment prompts ask me to synthesize research?

When a professor asks students to find multiple sources to support the work they are conducting, the assignment prompt is likely asking the students to synthesize information.

Prompts such as "provide multiple supporting to support your claims" are good examples of this. If you

you to include a synthesis or not, consider asking the following questions.

### Questions to ask yourself:

How many sources am I supposed to find and what am I being asked to do with them?

If it is more than one resource, and you are being asked to use them as a part of your argument, then it is likely a synthesis.

Am I being asked to use other people's work about the work they have already done?

If the assignment is asking you to use your own, it is likely a synthesis. Contrarily, if the assignment is asking to just explain the work of someone else, it is likely a summary.

Some assignments may want you only to use scholarly articles, statistics, video interviews, etc., or they may ask you to use a variety of sources. Be sure to check in with the assignment sheet and/or with your professor to know what kind of evidence you need to gather and use in your synthesis.

## I have my sources, now what?

Once you have collected the sources you want to use to support your claim or thesis from the research you have conducted, a good next step is to organize how you would like to move through your argument.

A good way to do this is to write your introduction paragraph, including your thesis statement. From here, you may have found a good feel for how you would like to present the information. If not, there are plenty of organizational tools to help gain clarity in this area of your writing. In particular, the University of Arizona Global Campus has created a simple but helpful tool to `o r g a n i z e y o u r r e s e a r c h` " called " `T h e S y n t h e s i s`

### Organization tool:

	Theme #1	Theme #2	Theme #3
Source #1			
Source #2			
Source #3			

The idea here is for you to be able to narrow down what the sources are saying about the topic, and how they contribute to your ideas and/or support your thesis.

### Example:

Thesis: *Keeping whales in captivity is inhumane because there is high likelihood the whales will experience intense depression, captivity will cause whales to negatively evolve as a species, and whales are only there for entertainment.*

	Theme #1	Theme #2	Theme #3
Source # 1 Blackfish (Documentary)	Captivity separates them from their pod's, th	Prolonged isolation in enclosures is bad	Increased levels of aggression and unpredictability

OR

Thesis: Tony Morrison's "Beloved" should be taught because it addresses important historical perspectives, promotes compassion for those suffering from oppression, and is a model for literary mastery of incorporating intricate themes.

	Theme #1	Theme #2	Theme #3
Source # 1 Introduction: On Incendiary Art, the Moral Imagination, and Toni Morrison (Article)	Beloved explores the impacts of harsh realities humans have and still face when enslaved, oppressed, and objectified	Beloved opens important discussions about pressing issues in our society	Beloved helps readers develop a deeper understanding of world issues

DISCLAIMER

The above sources and their corresponding themes may not be entirely accurate or encompassing of their actual content. They are being used for example purposes only.

### Placing quotes, statements, statistics, etc. from other sources

After configuring a general order as to how you might present your information and what points you would like to touch on as you move throughout the essay, it is time to consider how you will use your sources effectively. Using quotes from your selected sources adds weight to the points you are making, but using quotes is half the battle. The reader must know why they are relevant to the topic. This requires the writer to give a sort of commentary discussing how the evidence pertains to their topic and why paragraphs might look like this.

**Possible Structure:**

**Topic Sentence** - One part of your thesis you wish to explore

**Evidence 1** - Quote, paraphrased statement, or statistic from one of your sources

**Commentary** - Your thoughts on the evidence and how it relates to your topic

**Evidence 2** - Another quote, statement, or statistic that supports your argument

**Commentary** - Connecting evidence to topic and argument more

**Conclusion** - Wrap up what you are arguing in this paragraph and/or transition to the next paragraph with a sentence or two

The conclusion simply states the premise of what you have mentioned, briefly summarizing what you have already mentioned, collecting your thoughts, and possibly transitioning the essay into the next aspect of your thesis. After writing your paragraphs, consider asking yourself some of the following questions to better gauge how you might revise your work.

**Possible Revision Questions:**

Have I used other sources to add to ideas pertaining to my thesis statement?

If no, then consider going back through your sources and find pieces of evidence that would support certain parts of your argument.

Does my commentary make sense by correctly linking the evidence to my ideas?

If no, rework areas where it doesn't make sense and conducting free writes based on how it connects to what you are arguing. Talking about it outloud is another great practice for this!

Is the flow of my assignment hindered by tangents, or does the essay stay on topic through the commentary?

If you find your assignment to be choppy, jumping from topic to topic,

## Conclusion

A synthesis essay consists of incorporating the works of other valid sources while discussing original ideas about a topic to prove your own thesis. You are not mentioning sources just to tell people about them, rather, the writer uses them to their advantage by using them as evidence to their own argument. Synthesis papers containing relevant research and strong commentary are effective in persuading audiences and can be great ways for writers to learn about topics more deeply than they had before.

**Works Consulted:**

" Synthesis Writing Center, 2021, <https://writingcenter.uagc.edu/synthesis>.