

Synthesis as Acknowledgment

"In most of the writing you will do, both during and after college, you will find yourself drawing on the ideas, information, and statements of others, interpreting this material, and combining it with your own experience, observation, and thought to generate new ideas of your own. Some of this material will come from your reading, some from lectures and class discussions, some from conversations and interviews."

"To acknowledge your intellectual debts is by no means a confession that your work is unoriginal or without merit. In fact, original work in every field invariably builds on the prior work of researchers and thinkers." "Our thinking does not take place in a vacuum, but is shaped by a wide array of influences and sources."

"Various forms of acknowledgement are usually determined by the different purposes and audiences for which the pieces were written."

"Different publications and disciplines have their own styles and standards."

"Some writers cite only the names of authors or interviewees and the titles of works from which they have gathered ideas or quoted statements. These citations are incorporated into the written discussion."

An example of this technique may be found in Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence":

"During the intervening years I have gained a new appreciation for the philosophy of existentialism. My first contact with the philosophy came through my reading of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Later I turned to a study of Jaspers, Heidegger, and Sartre. These thinkers stimulated my thinking; while questioning each, I nevertheless learned a great deal through a study of them. When I finally engaged in a serious study of the writings of Paul Tillich, I became convinced that existentialism, in spite of the fact that it had become all too fashionable, had grasped certain basic truths about man and his condition that could not be permanently overlooked."

"Other writers use footnotes or endnotes in which they provide not only the names of authors or interviewees and the titles of works, but also dates of publication or of interviews and specific page references."

An example can be found in Carol Gilligan's "Interviewing Adolescent Girls":

Like the character in Woolf's story, "An Unwritten Novel," Mira keeps her life to herself; her speaking self also is "entombed...driven in, in, in to the central catacomb...Flit[ting] with its lanterns restlessly up and down the dark corridor."¹ Mary Belenky and her colleagues have described how women retreat into silence when words become weapons and are used to wound.² Adolescent girls invoke images of violence and talk in the language of warfare or about winning and losing when they describe the inner workings of explosive relationships, fearing also that such relationships can "throw us apart forever.

¹ Virginia Woolf, "An Unwritten Novel," *Haunted House and Other Short Stories* (1921; reprint, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 19.

² Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger and Jill Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

"Finally, instead of using footnotes, some writers provide author and page references in the text of their discussion and include more detailed publication data, such as titles and dates of the publication, in a complete list of works cited at the end."

An example can be found in Monica M. Moore's "Nonverbal Courtship Patterns in Women":

One legacy of anisogamy is that errors in mate selection are generally more expensive to females than to males (Trivers 1972). Hence, the females of a wide variety of species may be expected to exhibit traits that would facilitate the assessment of the quality of potential suitors in respect to their inherited attributes and acquired resources. There are many examples of female selectivity in a variety of species, including elephant seals (Lebouf and Peterson 1969; Bertram 1975), mice (McClearn and Defries 1973), fish (Weber and Weber 1975), rats (Doty 1974), gorillas (Nadler 1975), monkeys (Beach 1976), birds Selander 1972; Wiley 1973; Williams 1975), and a few ungulates (Beuchner and Schloeth 1965; Leuthold 1966).

By acknowledging their sources, writers implicitly establish what is new or special in their own way of thinking. The acknowledgment of sources also enables readers to verify the writer's claims and find materials that they may wish to investigate in connection with their own research and writing. For a variety of reasons, then, you should always make sure that you acknowledge the sources you have used in preparing a piece of writing.

Adapted from: Nancy R. Comely, David Hamilton, Carl H. Klaus, Robert Scholes, and Nancy Sommers' *Fields of Reading: Motives for Writing*. New York: St. Martin's, 1998. "Acknowledging Sources." 16-17. Print., by Christina Yaniga.