

Synthesis as Weaving

When you are asked to do research, you must consider at least three questions: Which authors have written on the topic? How are their comments related? How can I best weave the views of others and my *own* views in a meaningful whole? In writing a synthesis, you will infer relationships among sources, and you will use those sources according to your own purpose. A synthesis goes beyond merely stringing together a series of summaries; it must include *your* assessment of the sources.

PREPARING TO WRITE A SYNTHESIS

Synthesis writing formalizes the process of reading to infer relationships among sources.

Cross-referencing ideas

In order to develop a synthesis organized around *ideas* rather than simply summaries of each selection, use as key ideas the component parts of the topic as discussed by the authors. When you have cross-referenced those ideas you are almost ready to write.

A Strategy for Making Inferences among Sources

1. Read multiple sources on a topic.
2. Subdivide the topic into parts and give each a brief title.
3. Cross-reference your sources for each part.
4. Summarize author's information or ideas about each part.
5. Identify connections among readings, which may be related by comparison, contrast, example, definition, cause-and-effect—or by the extent of your agreement or disagreement with particular selections.

Clarifying relationships among authors

After you have cross-referenced what several authors say about a topic, you are ready to infer relationships among the author's discussions. The following questions will help you identify patterns of relationships:

Which author's agree?

Which disagree?

Are there any examples in one source of statements made in another?

Can you offer any definitions?

Are any readings related by cause and effect?

Ensuring your voice is heard

Although a synthesis makes use of a number of sources, ultimately it is your paper. You must have a point to make, a purpose which governs your choice of material and organization. If your paper is organized around sources rather than around your own ideas, then you will disappear from the paper.

Do Not Become Invisible in Your Papers

The danger signs:

1. Your paragraphs are devoted wholly to the work of the authors you are synthesizing.
2. Virtually every sentence introduces someone else's ideas.
3. The impulse to use the first-person "I" never arises.

A STRATEGY FOR WRITING A SYNTHESIS

Before writing a synthesis, consider how the ideas in the sources you have chosen will relate to your ideas. Consider also the relationships you have inferred among sources. The following guidelines should help you write your synthesis.

Writing a Paper Based on Sources

- Read sources on the topic; subdivide the topic into parts and infer relationships among parts, cross-referencing sources when possible.
- Clarify relationships among authors
- Write a thesis that allows you to develop sections of the paper in which you refer to the sources.
- Sketch an outline of your paper, organizing your discussion by *idea*, not by summary. Enter the names of authors into your outline along with notes indicating how these authors will contribute to your discussion.