

## What is synthesis?

Synthesis might be usefully described as the process of creating something new from the integration of two or more sources or ideas.

In an essay, this takes the form of two or more sources combining so as to support your position or point—think of it as arguing a position using multiple sources, where your own opinion is supported by two or more pieces of evidence.

Synthesis is *NOT* merely referencing or quoting multiple sources within a single paragraph, nor is it simply pairing together two quotations that agree with one another.

### **What does synthesis look like?**

Let's start with what it *DOES NOT* look like—it's not a jumble of quotations contained in the same paragraph.

The world really is round Derek W. Smith notes, "The ancients believed that the earth was flat and that it was possible to sail over the edge" (112.) Patricia L. Siddingfield, an expert on transportation, says, "prior to the development of cars, ships, and sailing were very prominent" (29.) Learning that the world is not flat changed society.

Although the two quotations might relate to a similar topic, as they are used in this example, they are not working together to create or support an original position.

Synthesis is also *NOT* pairing together quotations that simply share the same idea.

The world really is round. Derek W. Smith notes, "The ancients believed that the earth was flat and that it was possible to sail over the edge" (112.) Similarly, Kennedy S. Finnegan writes, "It was once feared that a person could fall over the edge of the world" (71.) Society has not always known that the world was round.

In this example, the quotations agree with the initial statement that the world is round, but that support does not constitute synthesis, or the creation of a new point, because there is no new information or positions being argued.

Rather, synthesis *should* integrate information from two or more sources to evidence *your* position.

Learning that the world is not flat changed society. Prior to the Classical Age, many people thought that the world was flat. Classicist Derek W. Smith notes, "The ancients believed that the earth was flat and that it was possible to sail over the edge" (112.) The perception of a flat earth affected knowledge and technology so that people were less interested in exploring by sea than they were trading on land. Transportation expert Patricia L. Siddingfield has suggested that the understanding of a spherical world was crucial in society's expansion across the globe: "Communities were locally minded prior to Pythagoras; after Plato and Aristotle concurred with the Pythagorean position, thinkers and mathematicians took up the notion. Ultimately, this resulted in the discovery of new continents and peoples and aided the spread of humanity" (30.) The discovery of a round earth, then, shaped history.

Here, the initial statement, which is a position taken by the writer, is supported meaningfully by quotations. The quotations work together to provide substance for the initial statement, the writer's statement.