

Synthesis Essay Structure

A synthesis essay should be organized so that others can understand the sources and evaluate your comprehension of them and their presentation of specific data, themes, etc. The following format works well:

The introduction (usually one paragraph)

1. Contains a one-sentence statement that sums up the focus of your synthesis.
2. Also introduces the texts to be synthesized:
 - (i) Gives the title of each source (following the citation guidelines of whatever style sheet you are using);
 - (ii) Provides the name of each author;
 - (ii) Sometimes also provides pertinent background information about the authors, about the texts to be summarized, or about the general topic from which the texts are drawn.

The body of a synthesis essay:

This should be organized by theme, point, similarity, or aspect of the topic. Your organization will be determined by the assignment or by the patterns you see in the material you are synthesizing. The organization is the most important part of a synthesis, so try out more than one format.

Be sure that each paragraph:

1. Begins with a sentence or phrase that informs readers of the topic of the paragraph;
2. Includes information from more than one source;
3. Clearly indicates which material comes from which source using lead in phrases and in-text citations. [Beware of plagiarism: Accidental plagiarism most often occurs when students are synthesizing sources and do not indicate where the synthesis ends and their own comments begin or vice versa.]
4. Shows the similarities or differences between the different sources in ways that make the paper as informative as possible;
5. Represents the texts fairly—even if that seems to weaken the paper! Look upon yourself as a synthesizing machine; you are simply repeating what the source says, in fewer words and in your own words. But the fact that you are using your own words does not mean that you are in anyway changing what the source says.

Conclusion.

When you have finished your paper, write a conclusion reminding readers of the most significant themes you have found and the ways they connect to the overall topic. You may also want to suggest further research or comment on things that it was not possible for you to discuss in the paper. If you are writing a background synthesis, in some cases it may be appropriate for you to offer an interpretation of the material or take a position (thesis). Check this option with your instructor before you write the final draft of your paper.