The Synthesis Essay

Synthesis Essay

- Make sure you cite by using quotes, summaries, or paraphrases- both direct and indirect citations.
- Make their words work for you by incorporating only what you need of the quote- never use full paragraphs (or even full sentences) if you can help it.
- Embed their words in your own words– this is the most mature way to synthesize.
- You must cite **3** or more documents (citing more than 3 won't affect your score at all, but citing less than 3 will give you an automatic score of 3 or less)
- Yes, you can bring in outside information
- The synthesis essay is not *worth* more, so don't waste all your time on it

Synthesis Cont'd

- Your argument should be the focus of the essay, NOT the sources themselves. Don't split your paragraphs around your sources (one paragraph dedicated to each source). *Synthesize* the sources into your argument. Pretend you're writing a research- based argument (yes- defend, challenge, or qualify) paper and your research is already done for you. Don't let the sources take over.

Synthesis Essay:

- The synthesis essay is really an argumentative research paper where the research is done for you. However, just like when you're looking at your own collected research, you need to make sure the sources are credible and not outdated. Sometimes the AP test will throw in a bunk or outdated source just to throw students off. Make sure you at least glance at each MLA citation before you decide that source will help your argument.
- Be cognizant of the requirements for citing three sources, but you don't need to use all of them.

Graders are looking for effective synthesis of sources into your argument. There are two main things I've seen that do not demonstrate effective synthesis:

Synthesis Essay Cont.

1. Formulating your argument around the sources. This happens when each paragraph gets a source (hey, three body paragraphs, three sources… yay!). In this case, you are letting the source requirements dictate your rhetorical direction. It is obvious that you are not fully synthesizing someone else's thoughts/words into your own. Instead, fit the sources into your argument where they might logically help to support a point you are making.

Synthesis Essay Cont.

2. Quoting too much information from the sources. Effective synthesis occurs when you only use quotes that can be embedded in your own words. You probably don't want to quote full sentences. A good rule of thumb is to never quote more than six words in a string. Also, quoting both directly and indirectly shows that you know all the ways to attribute information to a source. For example, if I'm going to quote Mr. Terronez, there are a few ways I can do it effectively.

Synthesis Cont.

(Source A) Mr. Terronez says, "Teachers and students, can I have your attention please for a few announcements?"

Effective synthesis:

Indirect Citation of Source A: Mr. Terronez asked for everyone's attention (Source A). OR In some schools, associate principals make announcements (Source A). OR Source A proves that associate principals can make announcements.

Here you are summarizing what was said or done and using it to prove a point while clearly attributing the information to a source.

Direct Citation of Source A: Mr. Terronez interrupted class "for a few announcements" (Source A). You will only include the key words that pertain to your point. We call this embedding quotes.

Synthesis Cont.

Ineffective synthesis:

Mr. Terronez said, "Teachers and students, can I have your attention please for a few announcements?"

This is a huge waste of precious space in your essay, and you're giving too much of the focus to Source A rather than just cutting out what you need and synthesizing it into your own argument.

Tips for Organizing and Writing a Position-Driven Essay from Liz Davis

- Attacking the synthesis essay: You have 15 minutes to read through the packet, annotate, and brainstorm. Use ALL of your time wisely.

- Read through the introduction and assignment.

- Circle or underline how many sources you need to use (usually it's three).

- Make a pro/con chart, brainstorming as many of your own ideas as you can before looking at the sources. (Always pick a side even in situations where it's telling you to determine important factors.)

- Read through the sources. Mark them as pro, con, or neutral. Note info you may be able to use in your essay.

- Don't forget to pay attention to the source's author, title, and year published.

Tips cont

- Determine which sources you will use for your essay
- Brainstorm "beyond the sources" examples
- Write your thesis– remembering to clearly answer the assignment
- Outline your essay (time permitting)
- *Your role here is that of a professional writer attempting to persuade others*

Tips cont

- **<u>Introduction</u>**
- Establish context for the issue (exigence, nature of controversy, implications, etc)
- Clearly state your own position on the issue
- Do not leave any doubt in the reader's mind concerning your opinion

Tips cont

- **<u>Body paragraphs</u>**
- Topic sentence asserting your first claim in support of your position. Beware: Paragraphs that begin or end with a source rather than an original assertion tend to result in source-driven essays.
- Correctly attributed evidence from the sources to bolster your assertion accompanied by explanation of how the evidence does that (think quotation sandwich!)
- Further discussion/elaboration or additional evidence from your reading, observation, or experience
- Concluding statement (commentary, clarification of what the evidence should prove)

Tips Cont

- **<u>Conclusion</u>**
- Reassert your position on the issue including a reason why you hold that position (Clue: this reason should be reflected by the claims you asserted in the body of the argument.)
- Position driven pointers:
- Consider including the following:
- -personal anecdote (e.g., a writer who works as a cashier indicating her preference for reusable over plastic bags)
- -definition of terms for your audience– must demonstrate original thought/arguing something meets a definition
- -pathos (Logos should be central, but the creation of pathos in support of your position can be a way to get beyond the sources and into the development of an original position.)
- - commentary on the sources- their reliability or lack of reliability, for example