

Writing 300
Objective
Synthesis
Assignment
Infosheets

Writing 300 Objective Synthesis Assignment

1. Overview of Assignment

This Infosheet offers an overview of the Objective Synthesis assignment.

2. Definition of Assignment Terms

This sheet defines keywords like "objective" and "synthesis."

3. Approaching Sources

This Infosheet addresses how to approach outside sources.

4. Synthesis versus Summary

This Infosheet defines the difference between synthesis and summary.

5. Topics and Themes

This Infosheet explains the difference between topics and themes.

6. Using the Thematic Grid to Compose

This Infosheet introduces how to use a thematic grid to help write your assignment.

7. Using an Outline to Organize Ideas

This Infosheet introduces how to use an outline to compose the paper.

8. Introducing and Drafting

This Infosheet addresses the introduction and first draft of your paper.

9. Citing Sources

This Infosheet addresses how to cite sources.

10. APA In-Text Citations

This Infosheet explains how to do APA in-text citations.

11. APA References

This Infosheet addresses how to write a reference page in APA.

12. MLA In-Text Citations

13. MLA Works Cited Page

WRITING A SYNTHESIS:

OVERVIEW

A **synthesis** combines information gathered from two or more sources into a coherent whole. The purpose of the assignment is to compare what multiple sources have to say about a single topic.

In the case of an **objective synthesis**, you should do this without introducing your own argument, opinion, or background knowledge. The goal is not to present your ideas, but to *re-present* the ideas of others. An **analytical synthesis**, by contrast, requires some analysis of the ideas you are reading and re-presenting. This distinction is explained further on Infosheet #2.

To write a synthesis, you should complete the following tasks:

- Familiarize yourself with the **terms** of the assignment
- Read the assigned **sources**
- Break down each source: identify the **topic** and the key ideas or **themes** related to that topic
- Categorize the information about each theme on a **grid**: identify relationships among the pieces of information you've gathered
- Use the grid to make an **outline**: decide on an order in which to present the combined information
- Draft your **synthesis**, beginning with an introductory statement
- Document your sources using the appropriate **citations**

(

(

(

WRITING A SYNTHESIS:

DEFINITION OF TERMS

To understand the synthesis assignment, you should understand each term in its title, whether it is an **objective synthesis** or an **analytical synthesis**.*

- **Synthesis** comes from the Greek word *sunthinenai*, meaning “to put together.” So, a synthesis is something “put together”: a combination, mixture, or blend. If it helps, think of other words that use of the same root: synthesizer, photosynthesis, synthetic compound, etc.
- **Objective** means neutral, impartial, or unprejudiced. If you are “objective,” you are not influenced by emotion or personal bias.
- **Analytical** means using logical reasoning or analysis. Analysis comes from the Greek word *lysis*, meaning to “dissolve” or “break down.”

In the case an objective synthesis assignment, you are being asked to “put together” other peoples’ ideas, and to do so impartially. In the case of an analytical synthesis, by contrast, you must first “break down” these ideas before recombining them – often with the goal of making a point, or answering a specific question.

In short, an objective synthesis provides a neutral overview of the sources’ ideas, whereas an analytical synthesis takes some position on these ideas.

* Talk to your professor if you are not sure what kind of assignment you are being asked to do.

C

C

C

WRITING A SYNTHESIS:

SOURCES

Your professor will assign sources for you to read. They may be newspaper or scholarly articles, essays, excerpts from books, or another type of source.

As you read your sources, keep in mind the following questions:

- What is the topic of the reading?
- What key ideas or themes related to this topic are discussed?
- What kind of information is provided about these themes?
- Do all the sources discuss the same themes, or provide the same information?

Remember that you will need to *re-read* your sources several times. The first time, you may want to scan quickly for the topic and main ideas. The next time, you will need to read more carefully, annotating as you go. You may also want to read sources for a third time, keeping an eye out for common themes.

(

(

(

WRITING A SYNTHESIS: SYNTHESIS VS. SUMMARY

In this assignment, you are being asked to synthesize, not summarize.

To summarize means to restate, in your own words, the content of one reading. To synthesize means to restate and *combine* – again, in your own words – the content of *more than one* reading.

- For example: You might summarize what one article argues about the impact of the Great Depression in the rural south. But in a synthesis, you would include multiple perspectives and arguments from several articles on the same topic.

Another difference is that summaries boil down something to its essence, while syntheses usually include more details. Also remember that while the organization of a summary tends to follow the structure of the original source, the organization of a synthesis is determined by the writer.

(

(

(

WRITING A SYNTHESIS: TOPIC AND THEMES

The assignment asks you to identify the topic and themes of your readings.

- The **topic** is the general subject of your reading. Examples of topics include advances in medical technology, climate change, or the causes of the Civil War.
- **Themes** are more specific. Although your source has only one topic, it may contain multiple themes that relate to this topic. For example, a source on the topic of drug addiction may deal with the following themes: the consequences of addiction, the science of addiction, treatment options for addicts, etc.

Although all your sources should have the same topic, they may discuss different themes.

You also need to identify the **information** provided about each theme, which may differ among the various readings, or overlap. As you read, look for the facts, data, or statistics that develop your theme. It is these sorts of *specific details* that you will want to include on your grid.

Most General

Most Specific

Topic -----> Themes -----> Information

Note: Instead of “themes,” your professor may ask you to identify “ideas,” “sub-topics,” or “main points” – all mean roughly the same thing.

C

C

.

C

WRITING A SYNTHESIS: THEMATIC GRID

Making a thematic **grid** will help you to identify the recurring themes in your sources, and to compare what each source says about each theme. This will enable you to easily see connections and disagreements among sources.

To make a grid, list your sources in the top row of the grid, and the themes you have identified in the left-hand column. List the information the source provides about the theme in the square provided.

Because different sources will deal with different themes, *remember that you may not fill in every square*. If you quote directly from the source, instead of paraphrasing it, remember to use quotation marks. If you don't, and you reproduce this wording in your synthesis, you will be guilty of plagiarism.

Sample Thematic Grid

Topic: List your topic

Theme/Idea	Source 1	Source 2	Source 3
Theme A	Paraphrase of what Source 1 says about Theme A	Paraphrase of what Source 2 says about Theme A	Etc.
Theme B	Paraphrase of what Source 1 says about Theme B	Etc.	
Theme C	Etc.		

(

(

(

WRITING A SYNTHESIS: OUTLINE

Once you have filled out your thematic grid, use it to create an *outline* of your synthesis. You have already assembled the relevant content – now, you just need to figure out how to organize and present that content.

Some guidelines to keep in mind:

- *Organize* your outline thematically – by theme – rather than by author or source. Remember that as the writer, you may choose to so put the themes in a different order than they appear on your grid: the order is up to you.
- *Identify* the recurring themes on your grid, i.e. those discussed by more than one source. Include a body paragraph for each of these themes. (If there is a lot of information about a certain theme, it may exceed one paragraph – in which case, think about how to structure your transitions between paragraphs.)
- *List* sub-themes or ideas related to your major themes. Include any relevant questions on your outline as well.
- *Give* your outline a title that identifies your topic and themes (e.g. “Advances in Medical Technology: Applications and Ethical Issues”).

C

C

C

C

C

C

WRITING A SYNTHESIS: INTRODUCTION AND DRAFT

Begin your synthesis with a brief *introductory statement*: one or two sentences which introduce your topic. (If you are having trouble starting your paper, see <http://www.york.cuny.edu/wac/for-students/info-sheets/Infosheet2.pdf/view> for ideas on crafting an introduction.)

As you write your **synthesis**, keep the following guidelines in mind.

- *Develop* paragraphs around the themes identified in your grid. Each paragraph should combine what your sources have to say about each theme. Aim to include at least two sources per paragraph.
- *Frame* your sources by providing set-up for your paraphrases and quotations. Remember to use *transitions* and *introductory phrases* to weave together the information from the sources.
- *Begin* every paragraph with a topic sentence, stating the main idea(s) of the paragraph.
- *Put* your paragraphs in a logical order; consult your outline, but don't be afraid to revise it.
- *Follow* your professor's specific formatting guidelines.
- *Check* to make sure all sources are properly cited (See **Infosheet #9**).

(

(

(

WRITING A SYNTHESIS:

CITATIONS

It is important to *cite* all the sources referenced in your objective synthesis. If you don't cite your sources, you may be guilty of *plagiarism*, which means using other people's words, ideas or data without giving them credit.

Citation is a two-part process that involves the following steps:

- Inserting *in-text citations* in the body of your assignment
- Creating a *bibliography* or list of sources at the end of your assignment

There are different styles of citation – the most common are APA, MLA, and Chicago. The citation style you should use depends on your subject or discipline. Ask your professor if you are unsure which one to use.

- For instructions on using APA Style, see **Infosheet #10-11**.
- For instructions on using MLA Style, see **Infosheet #12-13**.

Whatever style you use, keep the following guidelines in mind as you cite sources in your objective synthesis:

- When different sources present the same information about a theme, make one representative statement, but cite all the sources in which this idea occurs.

e.g. It is generally recognized that individual privacy is threatened by applications of recent advances in technology (Stephens, 1994; Quittner, 2000; Glaberson, 2001). [APA Style]

- When different sources present different information about the same theme, combine these ideas and cite the source for each one.

e.g. The consequences of addiction vary. Exercise addicts may suffer physical injuries (DeBenedette, 1990) while webaholics live artificial lives (Fernandez, 1995). [APA Style]

C

C

C

WRITING A SYNTHESIS:

APA IN-TEXT CITATIONS

In APA style, *in-text citations* are placed within your assignment to inform the reader what evidence is being quoted, paraphrased, or summarized, and what the source of this evidence is. The in-text citation refers the reader to the complete citation in the *bibliography* at the end of your paper.

What information do you need to include in an in-text citation?

- The last name of the source's author(s)
- The year of the source's publication
- The page number (if you include a quotation and/or refer to a specific page number).

You can include this information in various ways, depending on how you write the sentence. You may include all the information in parentheses, or only some of it. Here are three ways of citing the same source:

- Recent data indicate that “Black infants in the United States are more than twice as likely to die as White infants in the first year of life” (Howell, 2008, p. 31).
- Howell (2008) reported that “Black infants in the United States are more than twice as likely to die as White infants in the first year of life” (p. 31).
- In 2008 Howell reported that “Black infants in the United States are more than twice as likely to die as White infants in the first year of life” (p. 31).

Each of these in-text citations corresponds to the following complete reference citation in the bibliography at the end of your paper:

Howell, E.A. (2008). Racial disparities in infant mortality: a quality of care perspective. *Mount Sinai Journal of Medicine*, 75, 31-35.

(

(

(

WRITING A SYNTHESIS:

APA REFERENCES

Sources cited in the body of your writing assignment must appear in a bibliography or list of *references* at the end of it.

What information do you need to include in a complete reference citation?

- The source's author(s), title, and date of publication.
- Additional information depending on the type of source: book, journal article, Web site, etc.

Here are some examples of reference citations for different types of sources:

Book with a single author:

Garrett, E.A. (2006). *Infant mortality: A continuing social problem*.
Aldershot, England: Ashgate.

Journal article with a single author

Howell, E.A. (2008). Racial disparities in infant mortality: A quality
of care perspective. *Mount Sinai Journal of Medicine*, 75, 31-
35.

A press release accessed on a Web site:

United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2006).
Preventing infant mortality. From [http://www.hhs.gov/news/
factsheet/infant.html](http://www.hhs.gov/news/factsheet/infant.html)

For more information on how to create complete reference citations for
different types of sources, see the WAC Guide to APA available online at
<http://www.york.cuny.edu/wac> or the OWL guide at
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

C

C

C

WRITING A SYNTHESIS:

MLA IN-TEXT CITATIONS

In MLA style, *in-text citations* are placed within your assignment to inform the reader what evidence is being quoted, paraphrased, or summarized, and what the source of this evidence is. The in-text citation refers the reader to the complete citation in the *bibliography* at the end of your paper.

What information do you need to include in an in-text citation?

- The last name of the source's author(s)
- The page number (if you include a specific quotation and/or refer to a specific page number).

If you mention the author's name in the sentence, you can omit it in the parenthetical citation, but you still have to provide the page number in parenthesis. Here are two ways of citing the same source:

- From the beginning, the AIDS antibody test has been "mired in controversy" (Bayer 101).
- From the beginning, Bayer claims that the AIDS antibody test has been "mired in controversy" (101).

Each of these in-text citations corresponds to the complete citation in the bibliography at the end of your assignment.

Bayer, Ronald. "Ethics and Public Policy: Engaging the Moral Challenges Posed by AIDS." *AIDS Patient Care and STDs* 20.7 (2006): 456-60. Print.

C

C

C

WRITING A SYNTHESIS:

MLA WORKS CITED

Sources cited in the body of your assignment must appear in a bibliography or list of *works cited* at the end of it.

What information do you need to include in a complete reference citation?

- The source's author(s), title, and date of publication.
- Additional information depending on the type of source: book, journal article, Web site, etc.

Here are some examples of reference citations for different types of sources.

Book with a single author:

Henley, Patricia. *The Hummingbird House*. Denver: MacMurray, 1999. Print.

Journal article with a single author:

Bagchi, Alaknanda. "Conflicting Nationalisms: The Voice of the Subaltern in Bashai Tudu." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 15.1 (1996): 41-50. Print.

Web site:

Aristotle. *Poetics*. Trans. S.H. Bucher. Classics Archive. Atomic and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 13 Sept. 2007. Web. 4 Nov. 2008. <<http://classics.mit.edu/>>

For more examples of how to create complete reference citations for different types of sources, see the WAC Guide to MLA available online at <http://www.york.cuny.edu/wac/for-students/guides> or the OWL guide at <http://www.owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>.

(

(

(