

Synthesising

What is Synthesising?

Synthesising is **combining** different aspects of your ideas and research and the ideas of others in order to produce **new** ideas. It is an important aspect of academic writing; that is,

- to synthesise is an important and complex skill in Essay Writing, Literature Reviews and other forms of Academic Writing.

Why Synthesise?

At university you need to demonstrate that you can conduct research and then use that research in conjunction with your own ideas to produce new ideas or arguments. Combining your information in thoughtful ways to produce new ideas or arguments is synthesising.

To write assignments that reply on a sound argument based on sound findings. This is the process of synthesising.

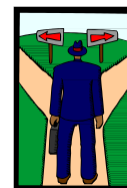


Synthesising is...

Synthesising is an on-going process. You begin with an idea of your own. Your reading and research adds to and develops that pre-existing idea or information. Along the way, stop and think about what you have read and consider where it fits into your argument.

Therefore, synthesising is:

- An on-going process, where you develop an idea or opinion based on merging your new found ideas with your prior knowledge.
- Evolving thinking – stop along the way and think about what you have just read – and consider where it fits into your argument.

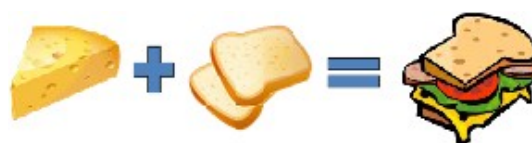


How do you Synthesise?

When you synthesise you paraphrase and summarise to produce new ideas or arguments.

To Synthesise you need the skills of:

- Paraphrasing and Summarising
- Unlike a Paraphrase or a Summary, which only use ONE author's idea at a time, a Synthesis combines two or more things to produce a new, more complex product.



Other skills in Synthesising

Other skills are useful in synthesising as well. You should be able to:

- **Separate facts from opinions**
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- **Draw inferences** or logical conclusions **from these facts** – For example:
 - **Fact:** Temperatures in Perth over summer regularly reach 33 degrees and occasionally reach 40 degrees or higher.
 - **Inference:** Summers in Perth are very hot!
- **Think** about the information and evaluate where it fits in with the argument (essay, report, review etc) you are developing.

You should also be able to think about the information and evaluate where it fits into your argument.

How to Synthesise: a step-by-step approach (6 steps)

This is a step-by-step guide to synthesising materials from a number of different sources:

1. You should begin by **brainstorming your ideas** on the topic.
2. Then **read relevant material**.
3. **Make notes on key points** from this material. Remember to always use your own voice and to reference the ideas and words of others.
4. Then **create a summary** for each text.
5. **Identity common ideas and differences** between the texts.
6. From all of this information you now **synthesise** or **write a new text**.

Always with the Question and Thesis Statement in mind.

Step 1. Brainstorming

Brainstorming involves:

- Thinking about what you already know about the topic.
- Jotting down any idea, facts, connections or phrases that come to mind.
- Reading the question several times to get as much out of it as possible.
- Extracting key words from the question and note them down.
- Thinking hard about what you already know about the question and its key words.

Step 2. Read all relevant material

As you are doing this:

- Record bibliographic details of the text. You will need these later for your bibliography or reference list.
- Always keep your question in mind so that you select material relevant to your topic.
- The length of your assignment is also important to remember in terms of what information you should keep and what is unnecessary or simply won't fit into this assignment.

Step 3. Notes-making

When you are doing this:

- Always make notes with your question and thesis statement in mind.
- Organise them into a logical order that you will be able to follow easily later on.
- Try to make notes in *your own words* as this will help you to process and remember the material more effectively. Using *your own words* in this way is called **paraphrasing**, while copying down a statement exactly is **quoting**. Don't forget to include references for your notes as well from the original sources.

Step 4. Summarising

After this, you need to convert your notes into short summaries. Your summaries should be no longer than a paragraph or short list of points for each page of notes. When making your summary, read over your notes and then convert the main ideas into simple sentences in your own words. Note that...

- A summary is similar to a paraphrase in that you must use your own (words) voice and sentence structure.
- However, it is different from a paraphrase in that it must be shorter than the original text.

Step 5. Identify Common Ideas

The next stage requires you to find ideas that are common or different in a number of texts. A helpful approach to this step is to always have your own ideas about the topic in mind first. Then look at different texts. Do they take the same approach to that idea or information? How are they different to each other and to your approach? Identify common ideas by:

- Reading a further two texts.
- Writing IN YOUR OWN VOICE the main ideas from the texts
- Sorting into a logical order
- Identifying similar ideas
- Identifying differences.

Step 6. Synthesise!

The final stage requires you to synthesise or put all of this information together into a new piece of information. Using your summaries, as well as your own ideas about the topic as a whole, write 1-2 pages on the topic. This synthesis should be a fresh look at the topic. It pulls together all of the information you have gained from your reading from a number of sources and makes it your own. However, don't forget to include citations for the ideas of others as they are woven into your synthesis. This will ensure you don't plagiarise.

Specifically:

- Write your new article (synthesise)
- Write IN YOUR VOICE
- A synthesis is a new product that brings together previously acquired information according to your organisational scheme.
- Don't forget to include citations for the ideas of others.

Synthesising Checklist

When you have finished synthesising a topic read over the checklist below. Have you completed each step? If so, you have successfully synthesised your material!

1. Brainstorm
2. Read relevant material
3. Makes notes
4. Identify common ideas/differences
5. Summarise each text
6. Write new text

Don't forget to cite (reference) all the sources used.

Synthesising is an on-going process

Academic writing is a process that is ongoing. There is often more than one answer or approach to a topic. You can develop your own answer, arguments or approach to the topic through careful reading of a number of academic texts. This reading is then synthesised or put together into new ideas of your own. You still need to acknowledge the ideas of others, but you will also produce something that is vivid, original and well-researched! So remember:

- Academic writing is a process – there isn't one definitive answer
- You develop your answer based on your understanding of the academic texts you have researched
 - And by synthesising the ideas from different sources into your own VOICE and ARGUMENT.



Where does Synthesising fit into the Big Picture?

Synthesising is one part of the bigger picture of using academic and critical thinking skills effectively. When you examine new material, you should always analyse it first – think about it in terms of its key ideas and how it relates to what you already know. Once you have read a number of sources on the topic, then you synthesise or put that material together, according to your own organisational scheme. Finally, you evaluate or think carefully about what you now know.

To Analyse → To Synthesise → To Evaluate

- How is it different to what you knew before?
- What new ideas have you gained or created?

