Synthesising

What is synthesising?

Synthesising involves combining ideas from a range of sources in order to group and present common ideas or arguments. It is a necessary skill used in essays, literature reviews and other forms of academic writing. Synthesising allows you to:

- combine information and ideas from multiple sources to develop and strengthen your argument(s)
- demonstrate that you have read widely on the topic
- use and cite multiple sources.

How to synthesise

Use the following steps to synthesise information from different sources.

- Read relevant material.
- Make brief notes using keypoints/keywords. This makes it easier to compare and contrast relevant information.
- Identify common ideas.
- Cite (reference) all the authors you have used.

Note-taking for synthesising

Write down the main points. Remember to cite the references.

Topic: English is the global world language

Text 1 (Watson 2011)

- international language for business
- used for international forums (e.g. UN)
- second language in many countries

Text 2 (Lui 2010)

- used in worldwide technology
- computers key factor in spread of English
- internationalisation of education

Text 3 (Hannan 2009)

- small number of speakers worldwide
- importance of English linked to US power, i.e. 'Political'

- more people speak Chinese worldwide

Text 4 (Dowd 2011)

- minority of speakers in world
- Chinese dominant especially in future
- English will decline in future

Writing a synthesis from notes

- Look at your notes and identify similar and contradictory arguments. Group these together to develop/support your arguments. Cite references appropriately.

Supporting ideas of Watson and Lui

Supporting the contention that English is the dominant world language, Watson (2011) and Lui (2010) point out its importance as the medium of international communication in business, technology and other global forums. However, others argue that despite its apparent dominance, English is not the global language when the number of native speakers of other languages, e.g. Chinese, are considered (Hannan 2009; Dowd 2011).

Weaving together similar ideas that contradict the previous statement

Reference citations

Example

- In the example below, notice the way the writer has organised and referenced information from multiple sources. Several authors' ideas are grouped in italics, and the other authors' ideas are underlined.

Individuals are classified as either an extrovert or an introvert. *Extroversion describes people who are outgoing, sociable, assertive, and optimistic and are in search of excitement (McAdams 2006; McShane & Travaglione 2007). Extroverts are confident in their abilities to accomplish tasks effectively and have faith in themselves. They enjoy risk taking, but can be unreliable and can lose their temper easily (Mathews, Deary & Whiteman 2003). Extroverts also focus more on the positive aspects and outcomes of life and therefore they have a greater level of self confidence.* On the other hand, introverts are described as being shy, quiet, withdrawn, less likely to make bad impulsive decisions and are more cautious in their actions (Matthews, Deary & Whiteman 2003; McAdams 2006; McShane & Traviglione 2007). As a consequence, introverts are more likely to place weight on the negative outcomes and aspects of social situations (McAdams 2006) and prefer to be alone, whereas extroverts have the ability to make friends quickly.