

## "Six Moves Toward Success" for a Synthesis paper by David Joliffe

### **Read Closely, Then Analyze**

**First**, the writer must read the sources carefully. There will be an extra 15 minutes of time allotted to the free-response section to do so. The student will be permitted to read and write on the cover sheet to the synthesis question, which will contain some introductory material, the prompt itself, and a list of the sources. The students will also be permitted to read and annotate the sources themselves. The student will not be permitted to open his or her test booklet and actually begin writing the composition until after the 15 minutes has elapsed.

**Second**, the writer must analyze the argument each source is making: What **claim** is the source making about the issue? What **data** or **evidence** does the source offer in support of that claim? What are the **assumptions** or **beliefs** (explicit or unspoken) that **warrant** using this evidence or data to support the claim? Note that students will need to learn how to perform such analyses of nontextual sources: graphs, charts, pictures, cartoons, and so on.

### **After Analysis: Finding and Establishing a Position**

**Third**, the writer needs to generalize about his or her own potential stands on the issue. The writer should ask, "What are two or three (or more) possible positions on this issue that I **could** take? Which of those positions do I really **want** to take? Why?" It's vital at this point, I think, for the writer to keep an open mind. A stronger, more mature, more persuasive essay will result if the writer resists the temptation to oversimplify the issue, to hone in immediately on an obvious thesis. All of the synthesis essay prompts will be based on issues that invite careful, critical thinking. The best student responses, I predict, will be those in which the thesis and development suggest clearly that the writer has given some thought to the nuances, the complexities of the assigned topic.

**Fourth** -- and this is the most challenging move -- the writer needs to imagine presenting **each** of his or her best positions on the issue to **each** of the authors of the provided sources. Role-playing the author or creator of each source, the student needs to create an imaginary conversation between himself or herself and the author/creator of the source. Would the author/creator agree with the writer's position? Why? Disagree? Why? Want to qualify it in some way? Why and how?

**Fifth**, on the basis of this imagined conversation, the student needs to finesse, to refine, the point that he or she would like to make about the issue so that it can serve as a central proposition, a thesis -- as complicated and robust as the topic demands -- for his or her composition. This proposition or thesis should probably appear relatively quickly in the composition, after a sentence or two that contextualizes the topic or issue for the reader.

**Sixth**, the student needs to argue his or her position. The writer must develop the case for the position by incorporating within his or her own thinking the conversations he or she has had with the authors/creators of the primary sources. The student should feel free to say things like, "Source A takes a position similar to mine," or "Source C would oppose my position, but here's why I still maintain its validity," or "Source E offers a slightly different perspective, one that I would alter a bit."

## Synthesis Paper Organization

Synthesis papers can be organized in several different ways. However, certain components must be covered in a synthesis essay. In general, synthesis papers will contain four major sections:

1. **An introduction** in which the reader should be oriented towards the subject in an attention-grabbing way. In addition, very brief, descriptive statements should identify the two (or more) texts that are being synthesized in the paper. Most importantly, a strong, analytical thesis statement should be clearly stated.
2. **Concise summaries** of the three to five texts to be synthesized. The next paragraphs following the introduction should give concise, accurate summaries of the texts being synthesized. You should be careful here not to over- or under-include the summaries. Each summary should be a well developed paragraph in its own right, but the paragraphs should be brief. The summaries should follow the guidelines we have discussed in class. It's important to remember that the main focus of the paper should be on the paragraphs that bring together your synthesis points, not your summaries. The summaries are there to play a background role for your reader and to show your understanding of the text. Thus, I imagine that your introduction and summaries will not go much past the first page of the essay. Summaries that are too long will dominate the paper and mean that not enough synthesis points will be discussed (especially if you are right at the 3-page maximum for this paper).
3. **Synthesis paragraphs** in which the thesis is supported and the ideas of the texts are brought together. Each paragraph will focus on one supporting point and include references to texts being synthesized. While differences between the texts can be identified, the paragraphs should not simply compare/contrast what the essays say. Rather, the paragraphs should bring ideas together from all texts to create increased understanding of the issue. The focus of the paper should be these synthesis paragraphs. These paragraphs will make up the bulk of the paper. The organization of these paragraphs will depend on what you have to say, and you can consider which points are most important to order these paragraphs. Each paragraph should contain paraphrases and textual examples (WITH CITATIONS!), but focus on combining (or synthesizing) the ideas from the text, not simply summarizing them. When relevant, the rhetorical situations of the texts may be included in these synthesis paragraphs (but there will most likely NOT be an entire paragraph only on the rhetorical situation).
4. **A conclusion** that rephrases your thesis and provides a wrap-up of the topic. While no new information should be introduced that advances the synthesis claim, you do not have to restrict yourself to paraphrasing or summarizing what you have already said in the paper.

## Writing a Synthesis Essay

Although synthesizing ideas is certainly a most difficult stage in working with multiple sources, don't neglect the actual writing of your essay. Spend some time planning your sequence of ideas and considering possible arrangements and strategies. Do your topic and materials lend themselves to a cause and effect structure, or definition, or problem and solution, or comparison, or argument?

Next, before starting to write each paragraph, review your sources' statements. By now, you should be fully aware of the reasoning underlying each point of view and the pattern connecting them all. But because your reader does not know as much as you do, ***you need to explain your main ideas in enough detail to make all the complex points clear.*** Remember that your reader has neither made a list nor even read the original sources. It is therefore important to include some explanation in your own voice, in addition to quoting and paraphrasing specific statements.

If possible, you should present your sources by using all three methods of reference: ***summary, paraphrase, and quotation.*** Remember that, as a rule, paraphrase is far more effective than quotation. When you paraphrase someone's reaction in your own voice, you are underlining the fact that you are in charge, that the opinion you are citing is only one of a larger group, and that a full exploration of the topic will emerge from your presentation of all the evidence, not from any one source's quoted opinion. ***The first sentence presenting any new idea (whether the topic sentence of a new paragraph or a shift of thought within a paragraph) should be written entirely in your own voice,*** as a generalization, without any reference to your sources.

To summarize, each paragraph of your essay should use some or all of the following elements:

**+Topic sentence:** Introduce the category or theme of the paragraph, and state the idea that is the common element tying this group of opinions together.

**+Explanation:** Support or explain the topic sentence. Later in the paragraph, if you are dealing with a complex group of statements, you may need a connecting sentence or two, showing your reader how one reason is connected to the next. For example, an explanation might be needed in the middle of the "seniority protects the worker" paragraph, as the writer moves from financial and emotional hardship for laid-off senior employees to the prevention of discriminatory job conditions.

**+Paraphrase or summary:** Present specific ideas from your sources in your own words. In these cases, you must of course acknowledge your sources by citing names in your sentence.

**+Quotation:** Quote from your sources when the content or phrasing of the original statement justifies word-for-word inclusion. In some groups of statements, there may be several possible candidates for quotations; in others, there may be only one; often you may find no source worth quoting.

## Guidelines for Citing for Synthesis

- \* *Cite the source's full name*, whether you are quoting or not.
- \* *Try not to begin every sentence with a name*, nor should you introduce every paraphrase or quotation with "says."
- \* *Each sentence should do more than name a person*; don't include sentences without content: "Mary Smith agrees with this point."
- \* If possible, *support your general points with references from several different sources*, so that you will have more than one person's opinion or authority to cite.
- \* When you have several relevant comments to include within a single paragraph, *consider carefully which one should get cited first and why*.
- \* You need not name every person who has mentioned a point (especially if you have several almost identical statements); however, *you may find it useful to sum up two people's views at the same time*, citing two sources for a single paraphrased statement:  
"Mary Smith and John Jones agree that playing the lottery can be very enjoyable. She finds a particular pleasure in scratching off the numbers to see if she has won."
- \* *Cite only one source for a quotation*, unless both have used exactly the same wording. In the example above, the first sentence would not make sense if you quoted "very enjoyable."
- \* If an idea under discussion is frequently mentioned in your sources, *convey the relative weight of support* by citing "five people" or "several commentators." Then, after summarizing the common response, cite one or two specific opinions, with names. But try not to begin a paragraph with "several people"; remember that, whenever possible, the topic sentence should be a generalization of your own, without reference to the supporting evidence.
- \* *Discuss opposing views within a single paragraph as long as the two points of view have something in common*. Radically different ideas should, of course, be explained separately. Use transitions to indicate the relationship between contrasting opinions.

### THE LIMITS OF SYNTHESIS:

In synthesis, you take several separate sources of information - a group of statements, a collection of essays - and you analyze each individual point of view and each way of looking at the topic. In the long run, however, your object is not to present individual summaries of every source, but rather incorporate them all in a new essay that is designed to represent a variety of opinion as well as your own point of view. Your thorough presentation of the topic counts more than the contribution of any single author. If the process of synthesis has been complete, coherent, and impartial, your readers can learn just as much about the overall topic - and learn it more quickly - than they would by reading each of the source materials.

### CITING SOURCES:

Throughout your essay, it is essential that you refer to your sources by name, for they serve as authorities for your explanations and conclusions.

## Aristotelian Appeals: Logos, Ethos, and Pathos

Whenever you read an argument you must ask yourself, "Is this persuasive? If so, why? And to whom?" There are many ways to appeal to an audience. Among them are appealing to *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*. These appeals are identifiable in almost all arguments.

To Appeal to LOGOS (logic, reasoning)	To Develop or Appeal to ETHOS (character, ethics)	To Appeal to PATHOS (emotion)
: the argument itself; the reasoning the author uses; logical evidence	: how an author builds credibility & trustworthiness	: words or passages an author uses to activate emotions
Types of LOGOS Appeals	Ways to Develop ETHOS	Types of PATHOS Appeals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Theories / scientific facts</li> <li>Indicated meanings or reasons (because...)</li> <li>Literal or historical analogies</li> <li>Definitions</li> <li>Factual data &amp; statistics</li> <li>Quotations</li> <li>Citations from experts &amp; authorities</li> <li>Informed opinions</li> <li>Examples (real life examples)</li> <li>Personal anecdotes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Author's profession / background</li> <li>Author's publication</li> <li>Appearing sincere, fair minded, knowledgeable</li> <li>Conceding to opposition when appropriate</li> <li>Morally / ethically likeable</li> <li>Appropriate language for audience and subject</li> <li>Appropriate vocabulary</li> <li>Correct grammar</li> <li>Professional format</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emotionally loaded language</li> <li>Vivid descriptions</li> <li>Emotional examples</li> <li>Anecdotes, testimonies, or narratives about emotional experiences or events</li> <li>Figurative language</li> <li>Emotional tone (humor, sarcasm, disappointment, excitement, etc.)</li> </ul>
Effect on Audience	Effect on Audience	Effect on Audience
Evokes a cognitive, rational response. Readers get a sense of, "Oh, that makes sense" or "Hmm, that really doesn't prove anything."	Helps reader to see the author as reliable, trustworthy, competent, and credible. Reader might respect the author or his views.	Evokes an emotional response. Persuasion by emotion. (usually evoking fear, sympathy, empathy, anger,)
How to Talk About It	How to Talk About It	How to Talk About It
<p>The author appeals to logos by defining relevant terms and then supports his claim with numerous citations from authorities.</p> <p>The author's use of statistics and expert testimony are very convincing logos appeals.</p>	<p>Through his use of scientific terminology, the author builds his ethos by demonstrating expertise.</p> <p>The author's ethos is effectively developed as readers see that he is sympathetic to the struggles minorities face.</p>	<p>When referencing 9/11, the author is appealing to pathos. Here, he is eliciting both sadness and anger from his readers.</p> <p>The author's description of the child cancer was a very persuasive appeal to pathos.</p>