



# Mapping a Synthesis Essay

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When asked to write a synthesis essay, many students question the word “synthesis.” What does it mean to synthesize? Well, the dictionary tells us that synthesis is the combination of ideas to form a theory; the thesaurus provides synonyms such as fusion, blend, and creation. So ultimately, you are creating a combination of what your sources are conversing about (subject X) and how you have rearranged what is being said to create a new direction for that subject. This quick outline should get you well on your way to synthesizing.

## Read your sources carefully and annotate as you go.

- Read through once for a general understanding of the source.
- Use a highlighter to call your attention to specific passages that you feel are key to this issue.
- Make summary notes as you go, so you remember why you highlighted those passages.

## Analyze the data you are getting.

- Ask yourself what the author’s claim is—make note of it.
- When the author brings in evidence, what is it? How does this evidence support the claim?
- Note any common beliefs or assumptions embedded in the author’s use of evidence and claims.

## What are sources “saying” to each other?

- When you can summarize what each source is saying, then you can take a step back and ask yourself: Is there a pattern; how are these sources communicating/responding to each other?
- What new way can you arrange these conversation pieces to address this subject in an original manner?
  - Example: If The New York Times is speaking on gun control, they may say “X.” Later, Fox News may also be talking about gun control, but they are saying “Y.” Both are discussing gun control as the “conversation,” just in different ways and at different times.
- How can you arrange these conversations to see what needs to be discussed (the gap in the conversation)?
  - Example: So, when you arrange the above example’s conversation, you can see that these sources are talking about “X” and “Y,” in terms of gun control, but no one seems to be specifying about “Z”. “Z” will be the gap in the conversation (you can suggest it as a new research area, new point to consider, etc.).



## Figure out what your particular stand is on this issue.

- After seeing where others stand, where do you stand?
- If you agree or disagree, why?
- If you agree, but not quite, what could be done differently? How could you make a position that might be a bit different than what other authors are saying?

## Take a moment to consider how others in the conversation might respond to your position.

- Why would article X's author argue with you?
- How would this author argue with you?
- If the author would agree with you, same thing –how and why?

## After this imaginary conversation with your sources, you should be getting an idea about your thesis and where it fits into the “conversation” that your sources are having.

- Research about topic A is currently indicating...
- Maybe a lot of people are saying X about topic A, but you have found research that is actually indicating Y as the real problem of topic A, so you say that new research needs to be done...

## Work on incorporating those “conversations” you just had into your essay.

- Although many researchers are indicating “X,” in discussions involving topic A, many of those research methods are faulty in that...
- When researchers in the field of topic A argue with researchers studying topic B, I am seeing that these two fields are actually linked in that...
- Aside from topic A, some researchers are finding a trend that (topic B) is actually more...
- In consideration of both topics A & B, I am led to believe that there is a vital resource that hasn't been considered...

## When incorporating conversations as you write, argue your thesis claim.

- Many who deal with topic A take a position similar to mine in that...; however, I would argue that new research needs to be done in the field of topic B.
- Although some who argue about topic A would oppose my position on developing new research in this field, here is why I still uphold its legitimacy...
- Only few researchers offer a slightly different perspective from topic A, and one perspective that I would call attention to is...
- When sources A and B were doing the specific types of studies on subject X, there were two different research methods: method 1 and method 2. Of these methods, there are the following common themes... (and) the usual points of disagreements are... which justifies the need for new research in...



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The successful synthesis essay will show readers how you have reasoned about the topic at hand by taking into account the sources critically and creating a work that draws conversations with the sources into your own thinking.