

Guide to Writing the AP English Language Synthesis Essay

In many ways, the synthesis essay is similar to the persuasion essay. In the persuasion essay, you make a claim, then support it with data stored in your head. In the synthesis essay, you make a claim, then support it with data stored in the sources.

#1: Cite four sources

Technically, you're only required to cite three sources.

In reality, you should cite four, at a minimum.

In your haste and incompetence, it is highly likely that you will mangle one citation. Give yourself some padding.

#2: Don't plagiarize

This essay is evaluating your ability to construct an argument using sources.

If you use information from the sources, you have to cite it. If you take text out of a source, you have to put it in quotation marks.

#2: Don't plagiarize

After you quote or paraphrase a source, cite it as you would in a paper: (Source F) or (Gilman).

Be consistent.

#3: Your essay needs a thesis.

You need a strong, clear thesis.

Everything which follows must relate back to this thesis. The thesis is the boss. Anything not working for the thesis should be fired.

If you aren't proving your thesis, what are you doing?

A specific thesis is preferable to a vague one.

#4: Don't summarize the sources.

If you are merely summarizing the content of the sources, then you have “substituted a simpler task” for a more complex one.

Summary of the sources is not argument.

#5: You need to be original.

What is the “synthesis” essay? You are “synthesizing” your view of the issue with the evidence in the sources. Don’t just summarize the arguments presented in several different sources and call that your own argument.

You have to be original. Don’t just present a hodgepodge of the arguments in the sources. RESEARCH IS ALL ABOUT NOVELTY! Remember: novelty is what gets you promoted in academia.

#6: Don't equivocate.

Qualification is OK. Equivocation is not OK.

Qualification: You take a side, but you do so with reservations, concerns, or exceptions.

Equivocation: You don't take a side. You discuss both sides and decide that they're equal.

#7: How to use sources

You don't necessarily have to agree with the sources in order to cite them.

You're trying to have "a conversation with the sources."

Be in control--don't let the sources push you around.

#8: Understand the sources

This is a reading test, not just a writing test.

You have to understand the sources.

If you cite a source but don't understand it, that counts against you, not for you.

#9: Working with quotations

You need to work with small quotations, not long excerpts. Try to work with snippets and phrases, not full sentences.

When you quote the text, don't allow the quotation to disrupt the flow or grammar of your sentence.

#10: Be careful with independent information

Keep in mind: this essay evaluates your ability to work with sources. If information not contained in the sources is essential to your argument, then you aren't showcasing your ability to work with sources. In fact, you're using information without citing a source to support it, which is officially bad.

Definition of “Synthesis”

“For the purposes of scoring, synthesis refers to **combining the sources and the writer’s position** to form a cohesive, supported argument and accurately citing all sources.”

“Combining the sources and the writer’s position” – in other words, you generate your own, original thesis, but you use the sources to support it

Definition of “Synthesis”

“For the purposes of scoring, synthesis refers to combining the sources and the writer’s position to form **a cohesive, supported argument** and accurately citing all sources.”

“a cohesive, supported argument” – in other words, an argument unified around a thesis, and you support that thesis with adequate data.

Cohesive = glue

Glue = thesis

Definition of “Synthesis”

“For the purposes of scoring, synthesis refers to combining the sources and the writer’s position to form a cohesive, supported argument and **accurately citing all sources.**”

“accurately citing all sources” – in other words, whenever you use information from a source, you cite it. And, you don’t misread sources, then try to use the source to support a claim the source doesn’t really support.

