

Synthesis Essay Notes



Follow the Rules for the Argument Essay

- Focus on interesting introductions, effective topic sentences, and a powerful, clear, thesis statement that establishes your argument in the first paragraph.
 - This claim must be something a reasonable person might debate
- I'd strongly consider a qualified response. Why? Because, as the AP guide on the synthesis essay notes, "[q]ualifying an argument is typical of a complex thinker and writer whose complex treatment of a topic typically yields an argument that is more sophisticated and accurate."
- If you concede a point, do it carefully and early to allow your own argument to recover after a weak moment. If you are instead rebutting an opposing argument, do so later so that this strong point will stick with the reader after they finish reading.

TIPS

- Use sources' names when you can
- Include sources throughout; spread them out, don't clump together
- Create an **issue driven** response
- Mark texts as you read: Support, Opposition, etc.

Annotate, Annotate, Annotate!

Use your fifteen minutes wisely, by actively engaging with the sources

- annotating any essential arguments you'd like to address.
- highlighting any **quotable phrases/sentences** that will stand out in your piece.

NOT A SUMMARY, but an Argument

- You should not construct a summary of the source material, but an argument developed from it. This is a critical distinction. Effective writers **weave sources throughout** their responses, rather than just moving methodically from one to another. Ultimately, you need to **take a position and defend it**, just like the argument response.
- The College Board says that writers should "[t]ranscend merely citing sources to evaluating how the sources support the student's own argument." It's good advice.
- **Include your own knowledge and insight from outside the source material**. Impress the readers with your own background knowledge.

Evaluate Sources Carefully

- The sources are not of uniform quality for inclusion in your essay. Carefully evaluate information like **publication date** (how might you use an article from 1975 on a "new media" topic, for example?), **bias**, and **target audience**. Some sources are just not very useful at all. Treat the image/visual as another text.

Use Sources as Naysayers

- One excellent way to include an effective naysayer or two would be to use some of the quotes on the other side of the issue from your own.
 - **Example:** Some animal rights activists would object, arguing that animals don't taste like meat [Source A], but...

Respond to Sources with Which You Disagree

- Look for logical fallacies/bias/weaknesses in the sources with which you disagree. You can use these positions as support for your claim.
- Comment on these sources. For instance, you might write, "Pogreba offers a superficial view when he argues..."



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Using Sources

- Avoid the temptation to become too reliant on citation and quotation. They should support your argument not make it.
- It's important to follow the requirement of the assignment. Typically, it asks for the use of at least three sources. Four-five sources would be a better goal.

Direct and Indirect Citation

- Cite by putting (Source A) at the end of the sentence or directly after the relevant information. Whenever possible, also use the source's name or the speaker's name in your sentence.
- When paraphrasing, do not sloppily cite vaguely at the end of paragraphs: Use parenthetical citation specifically where your paraphrase comes from. Paraphrase small sections of text, even portions of sentences.
- When paraphrasing, make sure you use your own language. Changing a couple of words is not enough.

AVOID THESE ERRORS

- *Distortion of any evidence from the source material*
- *Weakly sourced, vaguely located parenthetical citation*
- *Using fewer than four sources*
- *Accidentally plagiarizing from the source material.*

Samples of Source Usage

- McElroy (Source B) argues that President Clinton was one of the most effective televised speakers of the twentieth century.
- Since nobody forced the United States to make this "Faustian bargain" (Source D), the American people must accept the results.
- Tolstoy (Source E) seemed to agree when he wrote that "all Russian peasants should really consider getting jobs."

Making the Sources Work for You

Never let the sources lead your argument: YOU must **have something to say** independent of the sources, then support your claim with source evidence.

Ellipsis:

To eliminate extra information to keep the quotation short you can use an ellipsis (. . .) If the ellipsis comes at the end of the sentence, remember to add a fourth period at the end. Do not use ellipses at the beginning or ending of a quotation.

Example: Jones argues that "the First Amendment provides that "Congress shall make no law respecting . . . the right of the people peaceably to assemble" (Source A).

Brackets:

If you need to add words for clarity, place them inside brackets.

Example: Jones contends that, to those who "grew up in the 1980s, it [advertising] virtually was the environment."

Refutation Paragraph Strategy

- Topic Sentence (1): [The other side said]
- Summary of Opposition (1-2) [include a source, summarize opposition concisely]
- Refutation of Opposition (3-5) [CRUSH their argument]

Sample of Refutation Strategy ®

Criticism of the continued use of the penny is led by those who claim that the one-cent coin is useless in modern financial transactions. [topic sentence] Source C details these complaints: that the penny is economically unsound, that it is ignored by the public, and that the rest of the world has abandoned such low-denomination currency. [summary of opposition]