

Synthesis Essay Notes



Follow the Rules for the Argument Essay

In particular, you want to focus on interesting introductions, effective topic sentences and a powerful, clear, thesis statement that establishes your argument in the first paragraph.

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."

Annotate, Annotate, Annotate!

Use your fifteen minutes wisely, by actively engaging with the sources. I'd suggest:

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

The Essay Should Not Be 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.

Use the Best Source Material; 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.

Consider Using One or More of the 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..."

Tips

Use names whenever you can.

Don't clump sources together, but include throughout the piece.

Create an ISSUE DRIVEN response.

Mark the texts as you read: Support, Opposition, Etc.

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.

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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.

Use Both Direct and Indirect Citation Correctly

- When you cite, you don't need to worry about full MLA citation. You could cite a piece as (Source A) or (Pogreba). When you quote directly and the source has a name I would suggest using it.
- Do not sloppily paraphrase vaguely at the end of paragraphs, like you do in weak English papers. 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.

Samples

- 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 seemed to agree when he wrote that "all Russian peasants should really consider getting jobs" (Source E).

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.

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."

Boomer 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]



"Reading essays in a straight-backed chair all day long for seven days was about as much fun as I had imagined. At first, every essay was a fascinating challenge. Some were entertaining, a few were brilliant and most, which fell in the midrange, were proficient and dull. By the fourth eight-hour day, I began to crave surprise—the surprise of a well-turned sentence or complex idea, even the surprise of an incoherent paragraph—anything to break the monotony of the clichés and sameness."

—Jeffrey Schwartz



Sample of Boomer Strategy Structure

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]