

Analysis vs. Synthesis

In analytical writing you move beyond reacting to the content of the text, looking instead at how the text was put together or how the ideas and information were developed; you take the text apart, piece by piece, according to an analytical framework or set of critical ideas that helps you to see different parts or aspects of the text. The framework used most often in academic writing is rhetorical: considering the context of a text and how it achieves the intended goal.

While analytical writing is about breaking something apart and looking at the pieces individually, synthesis is about putting ideas and information together to see an overall pattern how things come together. In synthesis, you may be asked to bring together several assigned readings or sources you found through library research to address an issue or reveal what is known on a subject. You may also be asked to write a review of literature on a subject or write a report tying together a number of previous reports. In a synthesis report, the focus is on how the information fits together to lead to conclusions or an overview of the subject.

How to Write an Analysis

1. Identify what specifically you are analyzing and the method or set of concepts (the analytical framework) you are using for the analysis. Identify what the framework asks you to look for: particular categories, features, or parts of the object or text you are analyzing.
 2. Examine the text or object carefully in relation to the categories, features, or parts specified by the analytical framework. Take notes on all relevant details.
 3. Find patterns in how the various details and categories fit together. Do all the various parts seem to support the same overall rhetorical purpose?
 4. Draw overall conclusions about the patterns you have found through analysis. This overall conclusion will become the thesis statement of your analytical paper.
 5. Write the opening paragraph of the analysis. This paragraph should announce what you are analyzing and why, the analytical framework you are using, and the overall conclusions you have come to.
 6. Write the body of the analysis. Each paragraph or section should examine a single category or group of features exposed through the analysis. The topic sentence of each paragraph should relate to the overall pattern described in your conclusions. The largest part of each paragraph should be devoted to examining details of the text of object in relation to the analytical categories. Give many specific examples. In analyzing a text you should probably quote specific passages, but make sure you do not simply repeat the content or ideas of the text; maintain an analytical focus.
 7. Write the closing section of the analysis to draw together the pattern found in all the detailed analysis of the body section of the paper.
 8. In revising, pay special attention to make sure that the overall pattern of the analysis comes out strongly, that sufficient details are offered in support of the analysis, and that clear connections are always made between the details and the overall pattern.
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How to Write a Synthesis

1. Identify the appropriate texts to use. You may find it helpful to use the notes and references in one appropriate source to find other relevant sources.
 2. Read the sources carefully in relation to your purpose. Take notes or annotate your own copies to be able to retrieve relevant information easily.
 3. Think about the connections among the various sources. Do any of the sources agree or disagree on any points? Does one source provide background for another? Does one source take up where another leaves off? Does one source provide an example of an idea discussed in another source? Do any common ideas or viewpoints run through all the sources?
 4. Based on the pattern of connections you have seen among the various sources, develop an overall point or conclusion to serve as the organizing thesis of your synthesis. If you are writing a review of literature, your thesis statement should focus on how the various texts relate to each other. If you are writing a synthesis report, your thesis statement should focus on your conclusion about the topic itself.
 5. Develop a plan for presenting the various parts of the information in a unified way.
 6. Write a first draft of the synthesis. Develop the points made in each of the paragraphs through details from your various sources. Use quotations, paraphrasing, and summary to present the information from the sources.
 7. Document the sources of your information, using an appropriate parenthetical reference or footnote method.
 8. Revise the draft, paying particular attention to the transitions that tie the various parts of the synthesis together and to the overall coherence of the presentation. Make sure you maintain a consistency of tone and focus throughout the paper. Do not let the variety of sources you use lead the writing in different directions.
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