How to Write a Good Synthesis Essay

**First … What Is a Synthesis Essay?**

Before we jump right into generating ideas and [writing your synthesis](http://www.users.drew.edu/sjamieso/synthesis.htm), it would be pretty useful to know what a synthesis essay actually is, right?

When you think about a synthesis essay, you can think of it as being kind of like an argumentative essay.

*There is one key difference, though—your instructor provides you with the sources you are going to use to substantiate your argument.*

This may sound a little bit easier than an argumentative essay. But it’s a different kind of thinking and writing that takes some time to get used to. Synthesis essays are all about presenting a strong position and identifying the relationships between your sources.

[Don’t fall into the trap of simply summarizing the sources](https://www.kibin.com/essay-writing-blog/how-to-write-a-good-essay-commentary/). Instead, make your point, and back it up with the evidence found in those sources. (I’ll explain this in more detail when we talk about the writing process.)

Many of your sources will probably have information that could support both sides of an argument. So it’s important to read over them carefully and put them in the perspective of your argument.

If there’s information that goes against your main points, don’t ignore it. Instead, acknowledge it. Then show how your argument is stronger.

If this all seems a little too theoretical, don’t worry—it’ll all get sorted out. I have a concrete example that takes a page from the Slytherins’ book (yes, of Harry Potter fame) and uses cunning resourcefulness when analyzing sources.

To make this a little more interesting, I’m going to pick the following example topic:

*Are Slytherin House members more evil than members of other houses?*

Steps to Writing an Impressive Synthesis Essay

As with any good essay, organization is critical. With these five simple steps, writing a surprisingly good synthesis essay is surprisingly easy.

Step 1: Read your sources.

Even before you decide on your position, be sure to thoroughly read your sources. Look for common information among them, and start making connections in your mind as you read.

For the purposes of my Slytherin synthesis example, let’s say I have four different sources.

* Source A is a data table that lists the houses of all members of the Death Eaters.
* Source B is a complete [history of the Slytherin House](http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Slytherin), including the life and views of Salazar Slytherin.
* Source C is a document containing the names of students who were sorted into a different house than what the Sorting Hat had originally assigned to them.
* Source D is a history of the Battle of Hogwarts.

Step 2: Decide what your position is.

After you work through your sources, decide what position you are going to take. You don’t actually have to believe your position—what’s more important is being able to support your argument as effectively as possible.

Also, remember that once you pick a position, stick with it. You want your argument and your synthesis to be as strong as possible. Sticking to your position is the best way to achieve that.

Back to our example … after reading through my documents, I decide that the students and alumni of the Slytherin House are *not* more evil than students in the other houses.

Step 3: Write an awesome thesis statement.

Once you’ve decided on a position, you need to express it in your [thesis statement](https://www.kibin.com/essay-writing-blog/how-to-write-a-thesis-statement/). This is critical since you will be backing up your thesis statement throughout your synthesis essay.

In my example, my thesis statement would read something like this:

*Students and alumni from Slytherin are not more evil than students in the other houses because they fill the whole spectrum of morality, evil wizards are found in all houses, and their house traits of cunning, resourcefulness, and ambition do not equate to an evil nature.*

Step 4: Draft a killer outline.

Now that you have your argument down in words, you need to figure out how you want to organize and support that argument. A great way to do this is to create a [synthesis essay outline](https://www.kibin.com/essay-writing-blog/create-synthesis-essay-outline/).

When you write your outline, write your thesis statement at the top. Then, list each of your sub-arguments. Under each sub-argument, list your support. Part of my outline would look like this:

Thesis statement: *Students and alumni from Slytherin are not more evil than students in the other houses because they fill the whole spectrum of morality, evil wizards are found in all houses, and their house traits of cunning, resourcefulness, and ambition do not equate to an evil nature.*

I. Evil wizards are found in all houses.

A. Source A: Examples of Death Eaters from other houses

B. Source D: Examples of what Death Eaters from other houses did at the Battle of Hogwarts

In my outline, I used my sources as the second level of my outline to give the names of the sources and, from each, concrete evidence of how evil non-Slytherin wizards can be.

This is only an example of one paragraph in my outline. You’ll want to do this for each paragraph/sub-argument you plan on writing.

Step 5: Use your sources wisely.

When thinking about how to use your sources as support for your argument, you should avoid a couple mistakes—and do a couple of things instead.

**Don’t summarize the sources.** For example, this would be *summarizing* your source: “Source A indicates which houses the Death Eaters belong to. It shows that evil wizards come from all houses.”

**Do analyze the sources.** Instead, write something like this: “Although many Death Eaters are from Slytherin, there are still a large number of dark wizards, such as Quirinus Quirrell and Peter Pettigrew, from other houses (Source A).”

**Don’t structure your paragraphs around your sources**. Using one source per paragraph may seem like the most logical way to get things done (especially if you’re only using three or four sources). But that runs the risk of summarizing instead of drawing relationships between the sources.

**Do structure your paragraphs around your arguments**. Formulate various points of your argument. Use two or more sources per paragraph to support those arguments.

Step 6: Get to writing.

Once you have a comprehensive outline, all you have to do is fill in the information and make it sound pretty. You’ve done all the hard work already. The writing process should just be about clearly expressing your ideas. As you write, always keep your thesis statement in mind, so your synthesis essay has a clear sense of direction.

Now that you know what a synthesis essay is and have a pretty good idea how to write one, it doesn’t seem so intimidating anymore, does it?

Happy writing!

Two Synthesis styles:

**The Block Method**

**Paragraph 1:** Hook, Summary, Thesis

**Paragraph 2:** Analysis of how source 1 supports your thesis

**Paragraph 3:** Analysis of how source 2 supports your thesis

**Paragraph 4:** An analysis of what they both have in common and how that supports the thesis

**Paragraph 5:** Conclusion

**The Point Method**

**Paragraph 1:** Hook, Summary, Thesis

**Paragraph 2:** Analysis of your first point and how each source supports it

**Paragraph 3:** Analysis of your second point and how each source supports it

**Paragraph 4:** Analysis of your third point and how each source supports it

**Paragraph 5:** Conclusion

**Examples: The point method**

Despite what parent’s believe, their children will not be controlled forever. It is a very difficult for parents to accept, but children crave independence, especially as they approach adulthood. The story “Saturday Climbing” by W.D. Valgardson and the poem “Fourteenth Birthday” by Phyllis McGinley both describe situations where teenagers seek more control over their own life. In these examples the characters both want *privacy, trust and the chance to make decisions themselves.*

 As children mature, they don’t want their parents to dictate every detail in their lives. Moira from W.D. Valgardson’s “Saturday Climbing” plans to go to university 2000 miles away upon graduating. Her father has difficulty approving the idea because he wouldn’t be able to look out for her when he isn’t on “the faculty” (Valgardson 56). The *privacy of the distant university appeals to Moira assisting in her quest for independence.* The mother from “Fourteenth Birthday” attempts to deal with her daughter’s secrecy by reading her diary and listening to conversations “on the phone” (McGinley). The daughter expresses her desires for privacy with her outrage toward her mother’s actions. In both instances the children think it is not unreasonable to crave privacy.

 *The children are not wrong in wanting privacy, but with privacy comes trust.* A main reason they want privacy is they think that their parents should trust them. Moira pushes her dad to trust her enough to be responsible and go out all night “with a boy” (Valgardson 55). Her dad, although hesitant, eventually allows her a curfew of 3 o’clock which still makes him question consequences of his decision. In “Fourteenth Birthday,” the girl feels she is unable to be trusted even in her sleep where her mother tries “to learn her dreams” because of a lack of trust. The mother feels she is losing control of her daughter so she requires constant supervision. Eventually parents will have to have faith in their child to make the right decisions.

 *After raising their children for the beginning years, the parent’s need to let go allowing their children to make decisions on their own.* When Moira wants to continue to climb, her father is resistant and suggests going “back to the way” (Valgardson 59) they came. She has a plan and the initiative to take the lead, but is restrained by his lack of confidence in her. The girl in “Fourteenth Birthday” follows her parent’s strict decisions, but does so “in silence and distain” (McGinley) knowing her choices are due to her mother’s control issues. Until her mother allows some slack in regards to her ability to make her own choices, she knows her mother is acting out of love.

 Sooner then later children will receive the independence they so desperately seek. With privacy, trust and freedom in decisions, children will grow to be the individuals they can be. Parents need to accept the fact their children will be adults eventually.

**The Block Method**

Children and parents have argued about things for generations. Both Moira from “Saturday Climbing” and the girl from “Fourteenth Birthday” argued with their parents. There were many similarities and differences with the disagreements between parents and children.

 In the story “Saturday Climbing” the father has a tough time letting his daughter go, “the thought of giving her so much responsibility was like the prick of a thorn.” He would “wake in fear” with the thought of his daughter going off to university. Moira would argue with her father constantly about wanting more independence and trusting her to not participate in “smoking dope […]and participating in orgies.”

 The poem “Fourteenth Birthday” explores the earlier years of rebelling teenagers. She describes her mother as “the enemy” and is accusing her parents of being “spies.” The daughter wishes she could have privacy, but her parents do not want to accept her growing up, having to endure “love’s utmost treacheries.”

 Both stories explore the conflict between parent and child. Their children are growing up and the parents need to “trust the ropes” to catch [them] as [they] jump. In saying this, the children need to understand that it is not a hard task to watch them grow up.

 In conclusion, both “Fourteeth Birthday” and “Saturday Climbing” are about the conflict between parents and children and how while one yearns to grow up and receive independence, the other seeks to hold on to the baby they once were.