

WRTG 391
Writing Assignment #3
Synthesis Essay
(sometimes called a Literature Review)

Writing Assignment #3 will be a **synthesis essay**, a format that is sometimes referred to as a **literature review**.

Please click [here](#) for a video that briefly describes and outlines this writing assignment.

Organization:

Your synthesis essay should be organized in the following manner:

- Introduction:** Write one or two paragraphs in which you introduce the reader to your topic.
- Body-the categories into which you are dividing the literature:** Divide your sources into a few categories. **A suggestion is that you divide them into three to five categories.**
- Conclusion:** Summarize what the literature says on your topic.

Approach:

This semester, you have constructed a table of research findings of four articles that discussed research studies. You have also critically evaluated several articles in the annotated bibliography. In this assignment you will synthesize the ideas of several authors in a synthesis essay, or literature review.

For your annotated bibliography, you selected a topic based on your interests and, possibly, your major. You constructed a list of 12 references and summarized and critically analyzed them in 150-200 words each.

Through this process, you may have seen patterns in the scholarly literature in the topic on which you conducted research. For example, consider the following examples:

- You may have researched studies in criminal justice and found that there are varying opinions on how to respond to criminal behavior among youth.*
- You may have researched studies in psychology and found that counseling strategies for victims of domestic abuse tend to fall into four categories.*
- You may have researched graphic communications and discovered that the integration of graphics in business report writing has evolved from the 1970s to the present because of advancements in technology.*
- You may have researched articles on gerontology and found studies that answered three basic questions on how older adults respond to training for physical performance.*

In the synthesis essay, you will focus your research efforts in a particular area, perhaps as a response to what you found while writing the annotated bibliography. You will then conduct more research and synthesize your findings in this synthesis essay.

Please note that the annotated bibliography was the beginning, not the end, of your research. You might decide to disregard several of the articles you analyzed in the critical annotated bibliography because they don't speak to the specific area on which you have decided to write your synthesis essay. You might select one article that

you analyzed in the critical annotated bibliography, look up the articles cited in that article, and “snowball” your research in that way.

In other words, this process is a recursive one. You might find reasons to hone in on and narrow your topic even further after you have written the annotated bibliography.

How to organize the synthesis essay:

When you have focused on your topic, determine how you will divide the literature. In other words, consider the following examples we described above:

You may have researched studies in criminal justice and found that there are varying opinions on how to respond to criminal behavior among youth.

You might divide the paper as follows:

Introduction

Body

- Category 1: “A” view on responding to criminal behavior.
- Category 2: “B” view on responding to criminal behavior.
- Category 3: “C” view on responding to criminal behavior.
- Category 4: “D” view on responding to criminal behavior.

Conclusion

You may have researched studies in psychology and found that counseling strategies for victims of domestic abuse tend to fall into four categories.

You might divide the paper as follows:

Introduction

Body

- Category 1: “A” counseling strategy for victims of child abuse
- Category 2: “B” counseling strategy for victims of child abuse
- Category 3: “C” counseling strategy for victims of child abuse
- Category 4: “D” counseling strategy for victims of child abuse

Conclusion

You may have researched graphic communications and discovered that the integration of graphics in business report writing has evolved from the 1970s to the present because of advancements in technology.

You might divide the paper as follows:

Introduction

Body

- Category 1: graphics in business report writing in the 1970s
- Category 2: graphics in business report writing in the 1980s
- Category 3: graphics in business report writing in the 1990s
- Category 4: graphics in business report writing from 2000 to the present

Conclusion

You may have researched articles on gerontology and found studies that answered three basic questions on how older adults respond to training for physical performance.

You might divide the paper as follows:

Introduction

Body

- Question 1
- Question 2
- Question 3

Conclusion

In order for you to see this concept with a real-life example, you can access a [sample synthesis or literature review from a psychology student](#) by clicking [here](#). The student writes her paper on the following topic: Emotional Eating: The Perpetual Cycle of Mood-Food Influence. She divides her literature into the following categories:

- Influence of Mood on Eating Behavior
- Gender Differences
- Influence of Eating Behavior on Later Moods
- Chronic Stress Response Network

Notice how she synthesizes and integrates the research into the different categories.

Approach and Requirements

Your synthesis essay, or literature review, should be **2000-2500 words**, not including your “references” pages at the end of the review. In other words, the text of the paper should be 2000-2500 words.

In addition your synthesis essay should include **at least 10 scholarly sources** in the “references” section. As stated above, this means that you may decide not to use all 12 sources that you summarized in your annotated bibliography. You are free to use all 12 of them. However, it is possible that your experience in writing summaries of the 12 sources led you to conclude that a few of them will not be as helpful to your topic as you had originally thought. You may decide not to include such sources in the synthesis essay. This is totally up to

you. Moreover, you might find other sources that you would like to include in your synthesis essay that were not included in your annotated bibliography. You may use such sources in your synthesis essay as well.

Some helpful tutorials and guides from UMUC's Effective Writing Center:

- Click [here](#) for a tutorial that features two short videos on **writing a literature review**.
- Click [here](#) for a tutorial on principles in **synthesizing multiple sources**.

In synthesizing your research, you are analyzing the topic on which you have conducted research. Click [here](#) for a helpful tutorial on **analyzing a topic**.

Some helpful guides from other universities:

- Some very systematic **advice from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill** can be accessed by clicking [here](#).
- Some helpful **advice from the University of Wisconsin-Madison** can be accessed by clicking [here](#).