

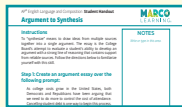
Turning the Argument into Synthesis

Duration

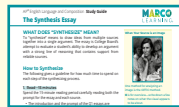
Two–three sessions (of approximately 40 minutes each)

Resources

1. Student Handout: Argument Prompt



2. Study Guide: The Synthesis Essay



Objectives of Lesson

- To introduce the synthesis essay by developing a defensible thesis supported with effective evidence from at least three sources

College Board Learning Objectives from the 2019–2020 CED

- CLE 4.C “Qualify a claim by using modifiers, counterarguments, or alternate perspectives.” (pp. 20, 21, 22, 77)
- REO 6.A: “Develop a line of reasoning and commentary that explains it throughout the essay (pp. 20, 21, 32, 37, 43, 61, 97).

Activities

- Writing the argument
- Supporting the argument with outside sources

How to Use This Lesson Plan

This lesson is designed to help students understand the difference between an argument essay and a synthesis essay. While most students are adept at developing their own argument, they are not as successful at creating a true synthesis essay because students often rely too heavily on the sources to make the argument. This lesson requires students to first write their own arguments, then conduct research to find and integrate evidence from outside sources to support their arguments. This is an effective introduction to the synthesis essay, especially if students have already received explicit instruction for the argument essay. This lesson has several steps, and we have determined that it is best left up to you to determine how you want to break them up, depending on your class time.

NOTES

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Step 1: Writing the Argument

As college costs grow in the United States, both Democrats and Republicans have been arguing that we need to do more to control the cost of attendance. Canceling student debt is one way to begin this process. Colorado Governor, Jared Polis, introduced a bill to the House of Congress that all college debt should be canceled. Former presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg proposed that college be free for families who earn up to \$100,00, while others argue that eliminating student debt will mostly benefit the upper-middle class, rendering it ineffective.

Write an essay that argues your position on the claim that canceling all student debt would be a divisive step for America.

Often, the prompt for the argument essay is obscure or abstract; however, because this essay will become a synthesis essay, the prompt is much more concrete. This adjustment will make the transition easier for students, which is important as this may serve as an introduction to synthesis writing.

Direct students to pay close attention to the prompt: they are not being asked if college should be free for all students. Instead, it is asking if canceling student debt would be divisive in America. Students should rely on the prompt to examine the two obvious sides of the argument: yes it would be divisive—it would mainly help the class who does not need the help, or no, it would help all those in debt. Direct them to consider how it might only benefit one group. We suggest that this lesson is used after students have written argument essays, so they should be familiar with analyzing an argument prompt.

Students will begin writing once you have determined that they've had enough time to consider the complexities of the issue. Students should type this essay because they will revise it to include outside evidence in Step 2. We recommend that you allow 40 minutes to write the essay, which is the College Board's recommended time for the argument essay. Once students are finished, you can collect the essays or ask them to hang on to them, but we do recommend that students take a break from the essay before moving on to the synthesis step of this lesson.

TEACHER'S NOTE:

Before distributing the prompt, you may want to jumpstart students own thinking. Perhaps you can give them a simple quick write prompt: should college be free? Then, give them one minute to write down their thoughts. Let them share out. Then, deliver the prompt, which is about cancelling student debt rather than making college free.

DEVELOPING A POSITION:

With this prompt, students can "defend, challenge, or qualify" the claim, and while this may seem easier, it is important that you spend time discussing the think piece. Encourage them to think critically about qualifying the claim as this could help them analyze the complexities of the issue.

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Step 2: Synthesizing Information

Reviewing the Study Guide

Distribute the study guide The Synthesis Essay, and review its contents with the students. To “synthesize” means to draw ideas from multiple sources together into a single argument. The essay is the College Board’s attempt to evaluate a student’s ability to develop an argument with a strong line of reasoning that contains support from reliable sources. We have already stated that students struggle with the synthesis essay for one reason: they rely on the sources to make the argument for them. Reinforce that they develop the claims and reasons. They will use the provided sources as evidence or expert support to advance their own claims and establish their credibility

Discovering Evidence

While students will receive a packet of sources with the synthesis prompt on exam day, our plan allows for students to conduct their research to find sources that will support their argument. Before directing them to begin their research, discuss the following considerations with them.

- They must incorporate three sources in their essay.
- Encourage them to find sources of differing perspectives. For example, if they rely on political sources, are they all from the same newspaper, or are they all published by conservative news sites?
- Challenge them to choose a source that could be used in the counter-argument.
- Most importantly, take some time to reinforce the characteristics of credible sources so that they can ensure they increase their credibility through their use of sources.

If time allows, you may take this step a little further and have students share their sources with a peer. Each partner can summarize their argument and explain how each source will strengthen it. The peer can review the sources using the checklist on the right to ensure that the sources appear credible. If each partner approves of other’s sources, students should be ready to revise the essay.

TEACHER’S NOTE:

This study guide reviews the specific steps in writing the synthesis essay. We recommend that you review it before distributing it to your students to ensure that this is the best time for you to introduce these steps with your specific students

TEACHER’S NOTE:

When checking a sources credibility, students should consider the following:

- When was the text published?
- How does the text connect to their claims?
- What are the author’s credentials?
- Is the information reliable – facts, neutral tone, peer-reviewed?
- What is the purpose of the text: to inform, persuade, entertain, etc.?

NOTES

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Synthesizing the Argument

Students are ready to revise their arguments after they have found their sources and completed the peer check. Remind students that they are strengthening their original argument with their evidence. They should not completely rewrite the essay—that is exactly why they wrote the argument first: to ensure that they develop their argument, not the sources. As students begin writing, remind them to briefly introduce their sources by including the author’s credentials or acknowledging the publisher. Additionally, inform students that they need to include multiple sources within each body paragraph to effectively synthesize information. The students’ claims and their outside evidence should be in conversation with each other. This means that they will pull multiple pieces of evidence from the sources and interweave them throughout the body paragraphs. You may need to review in-text citations with your students. A quick reminder should be efficient. Because this is a relatively new skill, we recommend at least 40 minutes for this process. Remember, it is better to go slow in the beginning! Students should also include a works cited page for their sources. Once students feel confident in the work, they should submit their essays to you.

Completing the Student Activity

After a discussion about the prompt, it’s important to revisit the line of reasoning, defined as the arrangement of claims and evidence that leads to a conclusion. As they work through the activity, remind them that effective commentary will draw connections between their evidence and their thesis statement. For this activity, there is no thesis statement, but each paragraph has a claim. If the paragraph contains commentary that explains how the evidence supports the claim, it is considered effective.

TEACHER’S NOTE:

Share the checklist below with students so they can ensure they have included the necessary components of the synthesis essay.

SYNTHESIS CHECKLIST:

- There is a clear, defensible claim.
- Multiple supporting claims/ reasons are offered.
- Multiple outside sources are used to back each supporting claim.
- A total of three outside sources are integrated throughout the essay. In-text citations are present.

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Argument to Synthesis

Instructions

To “synthesize” means to draw ideas from multiple sources together into a single argument. The essay is the College Board’s attempt to evaluate a student’s ability to develop an argument with a strong line of reasoning that contains support from reliable sources. Follow the directions below to familiarize yourself with this skill.

Step 1: Create an argument essay over the following prompt:

As college costs grow in the United States, both Democrats and Republicans have been arguing that we need to do more to control the cost of attendance. Cancelling student debt is one way to begin this process. Colorado Governor, Jared Polis, introduced a bill to the House of Congress that all college debt should be cancelled. Former presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg proposed that college be free for families who earn up to \$100,00, while others argue that eliminating student debt will mostly benefit the upper-middle class, rendering it ineffective.

Write an essay that argues your position on the claim that cancelling all student debt would be a divisive step for America.

Step 2: Discovering Evidence

Although you will receive a packet of sources with the synthesis prompt on exam day, this activity requires you to conduct your research to find sources that will support your argument. Before you begin your research, consider the following:

- You incorporate three sources in your essay.
- Find sources of differing perspectives. For example, if you rely on political sources, are they all from the same newspaper or are they all published by conservative news sites? Try to vary them.
- If you defend or challenge the claim, find a source that could be used in the counter-argument.
- Most importantly, be sure that your sources are credible and relevant to your argument!
 - When was the text published?
 - How does the text connect to their claims?
 - What are the author’s credentials?

NOTES

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- Is the information reliable—facts, neutral tone, peer-reviewed?
- What is the purpose of the text: to inform, persuade, entertain, etc.?

Step 3: Synthesizing Your Argument

Now, you are ready to revise your argument. Remember, you are strengthening your original argument with evidence, not completely rewriting the essay. As you begin to integrate your evidence, briefly introduce the sources by including the author's credentials or acknowledging the publisher. Additionally, you need to include multiple sources within each body paragraph to effectively synthesize information. Your claims and outside evidence should be in conversation with each other. This means that they will pull multiple pieces of evidence from the sources and interweave them throughout the body paragraphs. Before submitting your essay, make sure that you have a works cited page for your sources that coordinates with your parenthetical citations. Visit https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html and click on MLA guide for help.

Finally, you can use this checklist to make sure that your synthesis has all the necessary components.

Synthesis Checklist:

- ✓ There is a clear, defensible claim.
- ✓ Multiple supporting claims/reasons are offered.
- ✓ Multiple outside sources are used to back each supporting claim.
- ✓ A total of three outside sources are integrated throughout the essay.

NOTES

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The Synthesis Essay

WHAT DOES “SYNTHESIZE” MEAN?

To “synthesize” means to draw ideas from multiple sources together into a single argument. The essay is College Board’s attempt to evaluate a student’s ability to develop an argument with a strong line of reasoning that contains support from reliable sources.

How to Synthesize

The following gives a guideline for how much time to spend on each step of the synthesizing process.

1. Read—15 minutes

Spend the 15-minute reading period carefully reading both the prompt for the essay and each source.

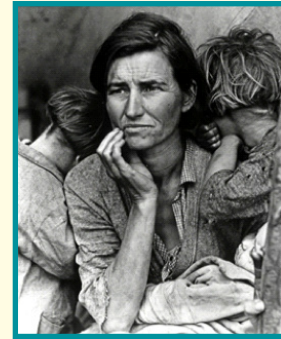
- The introduction and the prompt of the Q1 essays are extremely helpful in the brainstorming process. Often, the introduction contains information that identifies the different perspectives and/or stances of the argument.
- Be sure to correctly identify the writing prompt. Do not get distracted by the introduction. It is helpful, but it does not contain the writing task.
- Consider your initial stance on the argument. Based on your knowledge of the topic, you might be able to develop a claim and reasoning. If not, move on to your sources.
- As you read through the sources, identify the claims of each argument, data and evidence that support the arguments, and the assumptions or beliefs associated with the claims and evidence.

2. Plan—5 minutes

Before you start writing, you need to know what you’re going to write. Consider the following to determine what position you will take in your essay:

- Look for nuances and complications in the issues and think about how to address some of them.
- Avoid the first instinctual “for-or-against” argument that pops into your mind. The graders are looking for complex arguments that acknowledge multiple points of view.
- Develop a basic outline with an overall thesis (as complicated and robust as the topic commands) as well as a claim for each paragraph.
- Choose which sources you will reference in each body paragraph. We recommend that you use at least two sources within each paragraph.

When Your Source is an Image



One method for analyzing an image is the OPTIC method.

- **O** is for overview—write down a few notes on what the visual appears to be about.
- **P** is for parts—zero in on the parts of the visual. Write down any elements or details that seem important.
- **T** is for title—highlight the words of the title of the visual (if one is available).
- **I** is for interrelationships—use the title as the theory and the parts of the visual as clues to detect and specify the interrelationships in the graphic.
- **C** is for conclusion—draw a conclusion about the visual as a whole. What does the visual mean? Summarize the message of the visual in one or two sentences.

Citing Sources: When including evidence from the provided sources, it is important to place them in conversation with one another. You can use the following sentence stems for help.

Similarly, Source A states “...”

Although Source C may oppose this position, it is strong because “...”

Source E offers a slightly different perspective, illustrating that “...”

Finally, Source D develops this argument further by examining how “...”

3. Write—35 minutes

For maximum success, follow these guidelines:

- Remember, you are making the argument here, not the sources. Your thesis and claims should be authentic.
- The reasoning and evidence within the body paragraphs should be a combination of your ideas and insight from the sources.
- Develop a conversation among your ideas and those from the chosen sources.

Basic Essay Structure:

The Introduction:

- Open with an engaging hook
- Identify/clarify the issue at hand
- Present a clear, direct thesis statement

The Body Paragraphs:

- Begin with a topic sentence (viz., give one reason in support of your thesis)
- Explain as necessary
- Present specific supporting evidence (viz., quotes from the provided sources; you may also bring in other evidence)
- Document all sources
- Explain the significance of the specific supporting evidence (e.g., what does the evidence show or suggest as true?)

The Concluding Paragraph:

- Draw further significance from the reasons and evidence presented
- Bring the paper to a thoughtful ending (be philosophical; show your wisdom)

Annotated Sample Student Essay

Prompt: Write an essay that synthesizes material from at least three of the sources and develops a position on the purpose, if any, of historic preservation.

Thesis: Although historical preservation can protect properties of symbolic value, it ultimately stagnates the progression of our country.

Identifying Perspectives within the Topic:

In developing a nuanced position, it is important to consider the different viewpoints of the issue. Such perspectives can be:

- Cultural/Social
- Economic
- Artistic/Philosophical
- Scientific
- Ethical
- Environmental
- Political/Historical
- Futuristic

You may consider addressing a few of the applicable perspectives in the introduction of your essay. This helps develop your credibility as a writer.

While it is an indignity that the Pennsylvania Station was replaced with a “dismal modernist urban-renewal complex” (Source F), historical preservation does more harm than good for economic progress in America. Although well-intentioned, many of the architecture protected by the laws have become blemishes on the American canvas. According to Source E, a neighborhood protected by historic preservation laws has become derelict due to the high costs of repair and upkeep. One can assume that these buildings remain in their destitute state because developers are afraid to invest due to the low property rates. In similar instances, preservation laws make it possible for building owners to “maintain monopoly rents” (Source A). Again, this unintended consequence prohibits financial development opportunities in the community, instead only benefitting the few who can afford to maintain these buildings. In these cases, the preservation laws work against the possible progression that could spark economic growth in the community.

①

②

③

④

ANNOTATED ESSAY EXPLANATION

- ① This transition sentence quickly moves from the qualifying statement to the writer’s next claim.
- ② A clear introduction of the source leaves no confusion about where the evidence came from.
- ③ The student connects the evidence to the claim of this body paragraph.
- ④ There is a dialogue between the sources and the student’s claim.