



reading & synthesizing sources

So, you're in the research phase.

You need help reading for comprehension and putting together sources for your paper. Never fear!

Tips for reading smarter, not harder:

1. Look “around” the text before you start reading. This is called previewing. Develop a set of expectations about the scope and aim of the text, who wrote it, what their deal was, etc.
2. Mark up the margins of your text with words and phrases: the ideas that occur to you, notes about things that seem important to you, reminders of how issues in a text may connect with class discussion or course themes. This kind of interaction keeps you conscious of the reasons you are reading as well as the purposes your instructor has in mind. Develop your own symbol system: asterisk (*) a key idea, for example, or use an exclamation point (!) for the surprising, absurd, bizarre. Your personalized set of hieroglyphs will be useful when reviewing readings for papers and exams.
3. Take frequent breaks. In those break times, consider these questions:
 - a. How does this reading contribute to the main concepts and themes of the course?
 - b. How does it compare (or contrast) to the ideas presented by texts that come before it?
Does it continue a trend, shift direction, or expand the focus of previous readings?
 - c. How has your thinking been altered by this reading, or how has it affected your response to the issues and themes of the course?

Moving from Summary to Analysis

You summarize all the time—when retelling an episode of a show, catching a friend up on celebrity drama, or describing family lore to your significant other. It's all plot, little opinion.

Analyzing academic sources requires you not just to restate main ideas, but also to weigh in on the logic, credibility, and emotional impact of an argument (otherwise known as the rhetoric of the piece)! In analyzing a text, you reflect upon and decide how effectively (or poorly) its argument has been made. Here are some questions to help you move to an analytical mindset when reading or rereading a source:

- What is the writer asserting?
- What am I being asked to believe or accept? Facts? Opinions? Some mixture?
- What reasons or evidence does the author supply to convince me? Where is the strongest or most effective evidence the author offers? Why is it compelling?
- Is there any place in the text where the reasoning breaks down? Are there things that do not make sense, conclusions that are drawn prematurely, moments where the writer undermines their purposes?

Synthesizing sources

Synthesize (verb): to process a lot of information and spit out the most important or relevant parts for your purposes.

Researching and reading is a lot of work. Synthesis is where we often get tired and stuck. Once you have enough resources to start developing your own ideas on the topic, you can go through each one again and decide how you'll use it in your paper

1. Four Sentence Synthesis Method

Fill in the following blanks for each of your sources. If you're not sure how to fill one in, you may need to review the source or check if it's actually going to be useful to your paper.

In this article, the author asserts that [blank].

This piece of writing was influenced by the following trends, philosophies, or movements: [blank]

This piece of writing influenced the following trends, philosophies, or movements: [blank].

This piece of writing is going to help my argument by establishing [blank].

2. Source Synthesis Chart

If you're a fan of excel or keeping everything in one neat table, you may like the Source Synthesis Chart method:

TOPIC: _____

	Source #1	Source #2	Source #3	Source #4
What is the main idea?				
How does this help my argument?				
How does this relate to the				

other sources I have read?				
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