

Writing Handout E-16

Synthesis Essay Guidelines

Understanding Synthesis & Structuring a Synthesis Essay

Every day, we synthesize information. Writers, especially, synthesize material on a regular basis. **At the most basic level, synthesis means to combine multiple sources and ideas.** As a writer, you will use information from many sources to create your own ideas based on the analysis of what you have read, viewed, or experienced. As a synthesizer, you will be gathering information from a variety of sources; they could include novels, articles, movies, video clips, interviews, and textbooks—to list a few of the commonly used college writing sources. You will form new ideas, questions, and an argumentative or explanatory thesis—depending on your professor’s assignment instructions, the thesis style may vary. **The most important point to remember** when synthesizing content is to remember that *your argument* will be an *original one* based on *your research and analysis of the sources*. **You must first dive into the sources, actively read (or watch and listen to) them, think about them, and begin to process the information to create your own writing, using your own voice.**

When structuring a synthesis essay, remember the following:

- Know the **two types** of synthesis writing: **Explanatory vs. Argumentative.**
- Often, **the essay will follow a five-paragraph structure:** introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. *However*, as an advanced college writer, you may deviate from this structure—**as long as you fully synthesize your content and provide a clear explanation or argument with evidence.**
- The ideas, questions, or arguable points guiding a synthesis essay may be based on your **subjective opinion**; however, they generally employ **objective evidence and external data or proof** to argue or explain your point. As a writer of synthesis, you should know the difference between subjective content and objective. If you do not, take some time to review those concepts before moving on to the essay writing.
- **Synthesizing is NOT summarizing.** Summarizing provides key points from one source, and then provides more key points from another source. Synthesis requires **combining** information from the sources and **your own analysis** woven into the synthesis to prove your argument. That means **each of your paragraphs should include** the synthesis of multiple sources, along with your own ideas, style, and voice.
- As the writer, you must be able to show that you can **INTEGRATE** your research in a unique way that adds to the ideas presented in the sources you were provided or that you found on your own.
- Finally, when you **critically read or review your sources**, consider the following questions:
 - Do any of the sources have varying—possibly disagreeing—opinions?
 - Does one source extend the research of another?
 - Does any source raise new questions or ideas about the topic?

Continue to Page 2 for sample synthesis essay.

*In the sample essay following, *transitions are italicized*, and the **main ideas are bolded**. **The thesis statement is bolded and underlined.** The notations are made noticeable to help identify important, organizational aspects of the essay. In an actual essay, these items would not be marked.

Title:

Do not underline, italicize, or boldface your own title. Note how the title complements topic.

Introduction:

Interesting and relevant details lead into and open up the topic for synthesis. The thesis statement is bold in this example. Do not bold yours.

Body paragraphs:

Note specific examples that support the thesis statement. Also, notice how body paragraphs infuse multiple sources into the synthesizing while also offering original thoughts into the text.

Transition words:

Note italicized words that develop ideas within and between essay points.

Block quote example:

Block quotes are not required, but if you use one, format appropriately.

Complaints Be Gone: Happiness & Health Boost

Anyone who goes out into the world or simply experiences the news today is sure to hear griping and complaining. It is not difficult to find something to complain about these days, especially with negativity lurking around in so many places and people. Unfortunately, most people know someone in their lives who can find anything to complain about—even the most miniscule events or subjects become points of dismay. *However*, now—more than ever—people should consider how complaining affects their overall happiness. While some people cannot stand their eternally optimistic and hopeful friends who keep moving forward without complaints no matter what, those friends are onto something. Research has found that complaining is bad for the mood and overall health. *In fact*, those who complain more experience worse moods, feel less satisfaction and pride in the work they are doing, and are more likely to feel less happy while also experiencing lower self-esteem (which can extend into the following day after complaining) (Haden). *Furthermore*, complaining can negatively impact people’s general health. **Add all those qualities up and the result is clear: Complaining is bad for the mind and body.**

Complaining regularly is going to increase the chances of perpetual negativity and a serious dip in one’s mood. When people complain, mood naturally darkens to a gloomier state. Since complaining is a natural response in the wake of a negative event, it is to be expected for people to make negative remarks. *However*, with constant complaining, the likelihood of a more constant pessimistic attitude follows. *Psychology Today* writer Robert Biswas-Diener (2017) notes, “Some research suggests that making a habit of complaining can “re-wire” the brain so that those particular thinking orientations become ingrained.” Chronic complainers tend to focus on setbacks rather than progress, lean toward ruminating on problems, and often feel constant dissatisfaction in general. All of this leads to worsened mood on a regular basis. Because complaining becomes a natural state, the chances of simply becoming negative increase. The brain is rewiring itself to repeat thoughts—having a thought makes it easier to have that thought again. Even worse, “Not only do repeated negative thoughts make it easier to think yet more negative thoughts, they also make it more likely that negative thoughts will occur to [someone] just randomly walking down the street” (Stillman). Finally, complaining is catching. Not only does one’s own mood shift, but the mood of others is also affected. *Therefore*, complaining is bad for the complainer’s mood along with family, friends, and colleagues, too—anyone who hears the complaints.

***Furthermore*, complaining about a negative event actually “cements the incident” into one’s mind (Haden).** Thoughts hang around and begin to infiltrate daily life. The negativity can start to bleed into other areas of life, and then one is less happy overall. Daily satisfaction decreases, motivation at work can decrease, and self-esteem can take a dive. Because the brain gets used to these negative thoughts, it creates a space for a constant mood dampening. Indeed, the brain is now wired for this response. Wellness writer Steve Parton (2018) writes:

The brain is rewiring its own circuitry, physically changing itself to make it easier and more likely that the proper synapses will share the chemical link and thus spark together—in essence, making it easier for that same thought to trigger... Your thoughts literally reshape your brain, and thus are actually changing a physical construct of reality.

Knowing that complaining can alter the brain and—*consequently*—mood is important for people to learn how to prevent constant negativity and create brain space for happiness instead.

Body paragraphs continued:

Note specific examples that support the thesis statement. Also, notice how body paragraphs infuse multiple sources into the synthesizing while also offering original thoughts into the text.

Counter-argument paragraph:

When presenting the synthesis, if a counter-argument is required, provide source information to support the opposing point. Refute if necessary.

Transition words:

Note italicized words that develop ideas within and between essay points.

Conclusion:

Brings the synthesis to a natural end. Supports the argument. Closes the topic by coming back around to introductory ideas and thesis.

**Remember to include a Works Cited page, listing all sources used for reference in your paper. Follow all formatting requirements for your assignment.*

Note to students: This essay is a sample to illustrate format. Course instructors have copies. Duplication or near duplication would be regarded as plagiarism.

→ **Also, overall health can be negatively impacted by complaining. Quitting the complaining habit will help to keep people healthier.** Complaining usually comes with stress. Stress releases cortisol—a hormone—that can place the body into fight-or-flight mode. With that, oxygen, blood, and energy are directed away from everything except the systems that essential for immediate survival (Bradberry). *Then*, negative health effects creep into people’s bodies, such as raised blood pressure and blood sugar, which would prepare people to either escape or defend themselves if needed. Moreover, Dr. Bradberry states, “All the extra cortisol released by frequent complaining impairs your immune system and makes you more susceptible to high cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease, and obesity. It even makes the brain more vulnerable to strokes.” *Clearly*, complainers are more inclined to suffer the consequences of not only mental health decline but physical health attacks, too. Studies have even provided statistical data to prove why people should limit complaining: “One study published in the Archives of General Psychiatry found that on average, optimists tend to live longer than pessimists. Optimists were found to have a 55% lower risk of death across all causes and were 23% less likely to die of heart disease” (Pisano). Knowing this, people should really work to foster a sense of gratitude, mindfulness, and positivity to avoid a natural state of complaining—and increase the chances of living a longer, happier life.

→ **On the other hand, some believe complaining is good for people.** This side of the argument claims that we need to complain at times to help alleviate stress. However, the rule is that people still must be mindful because complaining can take a quick turn from a positive to a negative. Proponents of complaining, though, provide rationale for complaining. “Expressive complaining”—blowing off steam—and “instrumental complaining”—which is done with an actionable goal—can both be beneficial” (Higgs 2020). Venting is something people do, and it can help to gain perspective while putting words to feelings. If done effectively, it can possibly help people to clearly realize what, specifically, about a situation is bothering them. *In addition*, perhaps the social connection and feedback from others might help to offer insight about a situation. Sometimes the simple act of sharing and voicing feelings can alleviate distress around those feelings. *Lastly*, if the focus is on the impact of the problem, the importance of change, and how to create a plan for change, then the complaining may offer something positive in the end. Conversely, it is important to remember that these positive effects can be negated if the complaining becomes chronic or takes a negative turn.

→ **People who wish to lead healthier, happier lives will understand the role of complaining in their lives.** Mood, daily life, work, and physical health are all affected by complaining. Family, friends, and colleagues are also susceptible to constant complaining, so it behooves people to know how to avoid spreading negativity and stress. The brain can be altered with constant complaining; neurons are indeed impacted. People who spend too much time around chronic complainers will become more naturally negative, and this can spread into simple tasks—not only major negative events. Boosting overall health and happiness begins with looking for joy and remaining mindful—even when facing something difficult. Venting can do some good, but too much will lead to certain doom and gloom.

~Christin R. Hunter