

Synthesis Essay: Sophocles' *Antigone* & Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

Using what we've learned from Sophocles' *Antigone* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, you will compose a synthesis essay driven by an effective thesis that unites these two texts. So, first things first, what is a "synthesis essay"?

Synthesis is not magic, but a tool for drawing together particular themes or traits that you observe in various texts and reorganizing the material according to themes or traits put forth by you and driven by your thesis.

Although at its most basic level a synthesis involves combining two or more theses/ideas, synthesis writing is more difficult than it might first appear because this combining must be done in a meaningful way, and the final product must be thesis driven.

So you might be asking yourself, "What the heck am I supposed to do?" The key to writing any researched essay is to read well, to understand the main idea and developmental structure of the source articles, and to identify the points of contact between the various sources and your own argument. This means seeing how they agree, disagree, reinforce, subvert, explain and contradict one another in the context of your thesis. So, in a nutshell, synthesizing finds and explicates links between materials for the purpose of constructing a new thesis (syn-thesis) or theory.

The Key Features of Synthesis Include:

- Accurately reports information from the sources using a full arsenal of varying phrases and sentences.
- Organized in such a way that readers (audience) can immediately see where the information from the sources overlap.
- Makes sense of the sources and helps the reader (audience) understand them in greater depth.

(Adapted from <https://www.bgsu.edu/content/dam/BGSU/learning-commons/documents/writing/synthesis/asked-to-synthesize.pdf>)

That being said, you may first want to consider the Essential Questions associated with each of the texts we've studied:

ANTIGONE:

- 1) How do our moral and social values shape our interaction?
- 2) What does our response to conflict teach us about ourselves?
- 3) To what extent are we defined by our actions?

MACBETH:

- 1) How do power and ambition influence the choices we make?
- 2) Can people take actions they know are wrong and remain unaffected?
- 3) Does power corrupt all who possess it?

In order to arrive at an effective thesis, you may want to follow this formula:

TOPIC → THEME → THESIS

In order to generate your topic, think about how *Antigone* and *Macbeth* are related. A potential list of topics includes:

- Gender roles
- Human Nature
- Ambition
- Fate
- Fatal Flaws
- Loyalty

(Please Note: This is not an exhaustive list of topic choices.)

THINGS YOU SHOULD DO:

THESIS: As you generate a working thesis, know what point you are trying to prove and then make sure the rest of your essay sticks to that point and supports it. This is probably good advice for any kind of essay, but especially important for this kind.

TOPIC SENTENCES / SUPPORTING POINTS: Try to write complete sentences stating each of the supporting points you want to use to support your main point—or thesis. Then use these sentences as topic sentences for your paragraphs. This way each paragraph can proceed from the general supporting point of the topic sentence to specific facts, quotes, and paraphrases from your sources (material that gives authority to your own points). You can draw on points from your sources in order to expand, develop, support, and/ or illustrate your main ideas.

QUOTES: For specific facts, quotations, and paraphrases, always identify your sources. Introduce quotations by putting the name of the writer you drew the material from into your text whenever possible, preferably before the quoted material.

THINGS YOU SHOULD AVOID DOING:

AVOID constructing the body of your paper out of a series of summaries. This is the most common error that writers fall into when first attempting this kind of essay. Since you already know how to write summaries, it is easy to think that a synthesis is just a summary of different sources. It's not; writing a true synthesis is a different, more demanding, and more sophisticated task. Why? Because a mere collection of summaries, while much easier to produce, has one very serious shortcoming. Keep in mind that written sources dealing with the same topic typically include many of the same facts and arguments (usually just phrased differently). So, if you just summarize each source in turn, you usually end up just presenting the same ideas over and over—whether you realize it or not. It's up to you to digest and rearrange material from your sources. Simply summarizing them puts the emphasis on your sources and not where it belongs—on your thesis. Remember, your sources should provide evidence for YOUR thesis. Use your sources; don't be dominated by them.

AVOID bombarding your reader with undifferentiated masses of facts, examples, and quotations. Overwhelming your readers with information usually does not convince them to believe that material, but rather confuses them. If you find your paragraphs going on for pages and pages, it's usually a good

sign that you have NOT arranged your material for the convenience of your reader. You should organize your data to make it accessible; you should interpret the data to help the reader understand how the sources relate to each other and your thesis.

AVOID beginning your paragraphs by presenting quotations or facts from your sources. That's an example of the cart pulling the horse. It's much easier to start by telling your reader what point YOU want to make. Remember, when writing in general it's usually more effective to start from a general point and move to specifics. One tried and true method is to begin your paragraphs with topic sentences that spell out one of the supporting arguments for your thesis. Then use material borrowed from your sources as evidence to illustrate or elaborate the point made in your topic sentences.