

Synthesising Evidence

To “synthesise” means to bring together ideas from a range of sources. The synthesis process is an important academic skill that demonstrates your ability to undertake research and develop an argument. It therefore involves corroborating appropriate information and organising it in a logical way to present a point of view in response to an assignment question.

Effective Synthesis:

- Indicates a breadth of research
- Allows you to cite multiple sources, even if you have a small word limit
- Determines common themes on a particular topic
- Establishes your perspective based on your research

| Why Synthesise? | How to Synthesise? |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicates a breadth of research • Allows you to cite multiple sources, even if you have a small word limit • Determines common themes on a particular topic • Allows you to compare and contrast evidence/ideas • Establishes your perspective based on your research | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesise the ideas from your notes – this means compare and contrast ideas on the same topic, from different academic sources • Step back and work out what you think from all of it. • What is your overall position on the issue/question? • How could you organise a series of points to explain that position? |

Synthesising from Notes:

Using the key words, topics, or ideas as headings in your synthesis table, make notes about the different sources underneath the relevant headings/columns.

Example of Synthesis Table:

| | Boud, 2000 | Boud, Cohen & Sampson, 2009 | Boud & Falchikov, 2006 | Marcoux, Marken & Yu, 2012 |
|-----------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| Formative Assessment | <p>Is “sustainable” = leads to life-long learning/meets future needs</p> <p>Has been neglected in educ settings</p> <p>Helps us understand “how we learn”</p> | <p>Leads to deeper learning as well as meeting course outcomes</p> | <p>Meets wider set of needs</p> <p>Problematic to simultaneously incorporate grading and feedback – can be too “perfunctory”</p> | <p>In large classes, tutor feedback is simple and therefore ignored by students</p> <p>Beneficial for learning and engagement</p> <p>Increased confidence</p> |
| Summative Assessment | <p>Currently dominated educ. practice but is still ineffective</p> <p>Focus on narrow learning outcomes inhibits learning</p> <p>Performance based/competitive</p> | <p>Unsustainable/not ‘life-long’</p> | <p>Negative effects on learning – impact future professional practice</p> <p>Too much focus on accreditation</p> <p>Widely accepted by not future oriented</p> | <p>Still primary means of assessment at Universities</p> |
| Peer assessment | <p>Ineffective if focused on peers giving grades (summative)</p> <p>Peers learn by giving and receiving formative feedback (two-way process = feedback loop)</p> | <p>Assessing learning can be difficult</p> <p>Is reciprocal</p> <p>Promotes better engagement and reflection on learning</p> | <p>Peer collaboration = better feedback > deeper learning for both parties</p> | <p>Makes learning more interactive/builds relationships</p> |

Example of Synthesis in a Paragraph:

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| <p>Formative peer assessment has the potential to transform current approaches to tertiary education</p> <p>There is general agreement in the literature that peer assessment, particularly formative peer assessment, promotes effective learning for University students (Boud, 2000; Boud, Cohen & Sampson, 2009; Boud & Falchikov, 2006). Where summative assessment has been criticised for its emphasis on simply awarding credentials (Boud & Falchikov, 2006) and, in turn, its intrinsically competitive nature (Boud, 2000), formative assessment has been credited for promoting skills that foster life-long learning (Boud, 2000; Boud & Falchikov, 2006). Moreover, formative peer assessment is an interactive, two way process that leads to deeper engagement with learning material (Boud, 2000; Boud, et al., 2009; Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Marcoux, Marken & Yu, 2012) Given that summative assessment is still an integral component of tertiary education, and that formative feedback provided by academics is not only minimal but often ignored by students (Marcoux, Marken & Yu, 2012), participation in peer assessment groups, with a focus on formative feedback, may assist students to develop skills necessary for success, both in their current studies and in their future learning.</p> |
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