

Developing Skills for Synthesizing and Integrating Sources

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How can you develop strong skills for synthesizing and integrating?

You use the skills of synthesizing and integrating when you are asked to read several selections and then write an essay about what you read. The following steps will help you understand how to do this.

Step 1: Analyze the sources of information.

Step 2: Identify the relationships between ideas in the sources.

Step 3: Decide on a main idea that explains the relationship between all of the sources.

Step 4: When synthesizing multiple sources of information into your writing, use a standard format for citation.

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Step 1: Analyze the sources of information.

You have just read many different selections on the theme of ecology. Suppose you want to explain what you have learned about the topic from your reading. First, you must analyze the selections to discover important ideas about how people protect the planet.

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Directions: Use the following chart to identify selections and important ideas from *What on Earth?*

Selection	Important Idea

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Depending on which selections you choose, your responses might look like this.

Selection	Important Idea
“The Growin’ of Paul Bunyan”	When Bunyan tries to grow a tree, he learns to appreciate them.
“A Fable for Tomorrow”	Human actions can destroy the balance in the natural world.
“The Sun”	The setting of the sun every night and its rising every morning are wonderful.

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Step 2: Identify the relationships between ideas in the sources.

Once you've identified the important ideas, you need to bring them back together into one central idea. In this book, all of the selections are focused on a similar theme so you should decide what each story says about the concept of ecology. Following are some good questions to ask.

- Which ideas are similar?
- Which ideas do I believe are the most important?
- Which ideas speak the most to me personally?
- How do these ideas fit together?

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Directions: Revisit the selections and their important ideas you identified on previous screens. Identify how each one relates to the concept of nature.

Selection	Important Idea	Idea Related to Nature
		<i>continued</i>

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Selection	Important Idea	Idea Related to Nature

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Your responses might look like this.

Selection	Important Idea	Idea Related to Nature
“The Growin’ of Paul Bunyan”	When Bunyan tries to grow a tree, he learns to appreciate them.	When people understand nature better, they are more likely to protect it.
“A Fable for Tomorrow”	Human actions can destroy the balance in the natural world.	People can destroy nature without thinking.
<i>continued</i>		

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Selection	Important Idea	Idea Related to Nature
"The Sun"	The setting of the sun every night and its rising every morning are wonderful.	Nature is amazing, at least to people who are not consumed by accumulating power and things.

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Step 3: Decide on a main idea that explains the relationship between all of the sources.

Synthesizing and integrating are taking information and ideas and combining them into a new whole. By writing a main idea based upon the ideas you gathered from several selections in the book, you will be creating a new statement. Develop a main idea that encompasses ideas from three or more selections. If you are writing an essay, your main idea may also become your thesis statement.

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Directions: Synthesize the information gathered from the selections into a main idea statement.

Possible synthesis: The key to a good relationship between humans and nature is for people to be open to the wonders of nature.

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Step 4: When synthesizing multiple sources of information into your writing, use a standard format for citation.

When writing a literary analysis, you should refer to works of literature accurately and appropriately. The following screens provide examples of how to integrate works of literature into your writing by using:

- short direct quotations
- long direct quotations
- paraphrases of literature

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The following excerpt is from “Only a Little Planet” by Lawrence Collins (page 4).

The planet you're standing on
looking out at the stars
is the earth, the third planet from the sun

and the mildest
and softest
of the nine. . . .

The next screens will demonstrate how to integrate the information into an essay.

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Short Direct Quotations: These are word-for-word quotations that are four lines or shorter. To tell your reader exactly where the direct quotation begins and ends, use quotation marks before and after the passage. Identify the source in parentheses by listing the author's last name and the page number. If you mention the author in the text, list only the page number.

In “Only a Little Planet,” the poet treats Earth as a gentle place, calling it “the mildest and softest” planet in the solar system (Collins 4).

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Long Direct Quotations: If a direct quotation is four lines or longer, set it off as a block quotation. It should be indented one inch from the left margin and include a reference to the source. Since the text is set off visually, you do not need to use quotation marks around it. Do include a parenthetical source. See the example on the next screen.

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The opening lines of “Only Little Planet” present our planet in the context of the entire solar system:

The planet you’re standing on
looking out at the stars
is the earth, the third planet from the sun
and the mildest
and softest
of the nine. . . . (Collins 4)

In the lines that follow, the author focuses more on how people should see the earth.

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Paraphrases: These are passages written in your own words that express information that you learned from another source. Do not use quotation marks with these but do include a parenthetical citation.

Collins opens the poem by placing the earth in the context of the entire solar system (4).

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If you write an essay or a research paper, you may be asked to include a Works Cited page. This page should include all the sources you used, not just the ones directly quoted. Here are some examples of how to list sources.

A book:

Leverlov, Denise. *The Life Around Us: Selected Poems on Nature*. New York: New Directions Books, 1997. Print.

A short story in an anthology:

Collins, Lawrence. "Only a Little Planet." *What on Earth? An Ecology Reader*. Ed. Julie A. Schumacher. Logan, Iowa: Perfection Learning, 2006. Print.