

AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE & COMPOSITION

Synthesis Essay

The synthesis essay is simply a persuasive essay (argument essay) writ large. You have already written persuasive essays in response to argument prompts (as well as, undoubtedly, in other English classes). The synthesis essay asks you to read materials from diverse sources and develop your own thesis on the topic and use the source materials to support your opinion. (Unlike the synthesis essay, the argument essay on the AP exam does not provide you with much, if any, source material to work with – you and your brain are the primary source for the argument essay.) Here are some helpful tips on how to approach the synthesis essay:

1. **STEP ONE: Read.** Read ALL of the source materials. Engage in active, close reading. Underline main ideas and briefly summarize (1-5 words max.) each source on the source document. This saves you time when you need to consult the materials as you write.
2. **STEP TWO: Take a stand.** As you read the synthesis materials, consider what POSITION you will take on the topic. Don't agonize over it. Recall that your opinion can be "for," "against," or "qualified" (meaning that you partially agree and partially disagree). **Note:** qualified arguments cannot be wishy-washy or indecisive; they need to reflect maturity and judgment, not an inability to make up your mind.
3. **STEP THREE: Pick a tone.** Consider what TONE you will choose to adopt for your essay. An intentional tone is evidence of a mature writer. **Note:** Recall what types of tone there are:

humorous	satiric	serious
objective	balanced	patriotic
subjective	nostalgic	urgent
alarmist	playful	disdainful
folksy	critical	skeptical
enthusiastic	appreciative	respectful

4. **STEP FOUR: Select quotes.** After you have read the materials, reflected on them, and taken a stand, select AT LEAST FOUR BRIEF QUOTES (one AGAINST your position and three FOR your position) from AT LEAST THREE DIFFERENT SOURCES. Jot them down on the prompt as a way to start organizing your paper. **Note:** AP graders like to see as many source materials quoted as possible, including the visual source (cartoon, photo, graph, etc.).
5. **STEP FIVE: Your evidence.** After the quotes, list THREE pieces of evidence YOU will bring to the essay. **Note:** Your evidence can be personal anecdotes (your own, your cousin's, your dad's, etc.) or your knowledge (what you know from history class, what you know about current events, what you know about your Factoid Friday controversial topic [or someone else's], etc.).

Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

6. **STEP SIX: Write your introduction.** Draft an opening paragraph in which you clearly state your position and communicate the overall tone. **Note:** Position and tone are ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS for your introduction.
7. **STEP SEVEN: Outline your essay.** Using your position, your selected quotes, and your personal evidence, outline your essay. Again, don't agonize over it (you don't have time), but spend enough time to create a rough road map that you can consult while you write so you recall what direction you want to go with your essay. **Note:** Outlining helps prevent the problem of "writing into the essay" – i.e., the beginning of the essay is confused and disorganized, but becomes increasingly more organized and convincing as it progresses because the student's thoughts are clearing as he/she writes.
8. **STEP EIGHT: Write your essay.** Avoid the five-paragraph essay structure. Use as many paragraphs as necessary to persuade your audience. **Note:** You still need an introduction and a conclusion, but include as many body paragraphs as needed.