RMIT
UNIVERSITY

SYNTHESISING

Synthesising information is an important and complex skill required in academic writing. It involves combining ideas from a range of sources in order to group and present ideas, themes and issues in a logical manner. Synthesising is required in essays, literature reviews and other forms of academic writing. Unlike summarising and paraphrasing, which use the ideas of one author at a time, synthesising combines ideas from more than one source and integrates them into your argument.

Synthesising allows you to:

- focus on the issues and ideas rather than authors

- combine information from multiple sources to develop and strengthen your arguments

- demonstrate that you've read widely on the topic

- use and cite multiple sources.

Steps for synthesising research in your writing

1. Brainstorm the issues related to your topic.

2. Read widely on the topic, focussing on the issues relevant to your assignment.

3. Make notes in your own words about what each text says about the issues.

4. Write an outline of what each text says about a particular issue or theme; group them together on the same page. This makes it easier to compare the content of the various texts. Include all references.

5. Look for similar issues addressed in the texts. List the points of agreement and disagreement between authors. (Also, consider why the authors have different opinions.)

6. Decide on a logical order for the information and ideas you want to include in your writing.

7. Draft your paragraph(s) on the issue(s) using your notes. Use a topic sentence to introduce the theme and then use the synthesised information to develop your ideas. Make sure you reference your sources.

The following example shows how several sources of information have been integrated into one paragraph about methods of giving up smoking.

The majority of smokers have wanted to stop smoking at one or more times in their smoking history (Koh, Chen, & Bailey, 2012; Lee, 2010; Tanner & McKay, 2014). The addictive nature of smoking has deterred smokers in their attempts to quit (Reid & Jones, 2013), and smokers have attempted a wide range of methods to break their addiction. While some have relied on willpower (Lee, 2010), others have sought assistance from the pharmaceutical industry (Reid & Jones, 2013; Tanner & McKay, 2014). Alternative methods of giving up smoking are also being explored by smokers. This is seen in recent studies reporting an increase in the use of herbal and other complementary medicines to address nicotine dependency (Koh, Chen, & Bailey, 2012; Lee, 2010; Reid & Jones, 2013). The effectiveness of these methods in assisting smokers in their attempts to give up smoking is investigated in the following sections of this report.

This example uses APA referencing.

Example

This example illustrates how ideas from four different sources have been synthesised.

Topic: There are elements in successful teams that are more important than its leader

Text 4 (Skaftouros 2012)

− Comparing team performance
− Teams of the future
− Teams in small business operations

Text 1 (Chia 2013)

− Teams vary in role
− Teams can devise tasks for members
− Experience of teams in Sweden

The way a team is established and prepared is critical to its successful performance. Skaftouros (2012) and Chia (2013) point out the importance of clearly defining team roles from the outset, and state that this is as important, if not more important, than the role of a leader. While the leader can add an element of organisation and clarity, these aspects can be implemented and planned at the outset by the team as a whole. In this way, the team gains maximum cohesion and functions as a strong entity in the business world of today (Nguyen 2014; Young 2011).

This example uses Harvard referencing.

Text 2 (Young 2011)

− Teams blame the leader too easily
− Ways to solve problems
− Problem-based learning

Text 3 (Nguyen 2014)

− Different role of leader and manager
− Ways of training
− Developing effective teams