

## The Synthesis Essay



"Synthesizing is the process whereby a student merges new information with prior knowledge to form a new idea, perspective, or opinion to create insight."  
- Shannon Bumgarner

### ***What is "synthesis writing"?***

A synthesis is an opportunity to create new knowledge out of already existing knowledge, i.e., other sources. You combine, "synthesize," the information in your sources to develop an argument or a unique perspective on a topic. Your thesis statement becomes a one sentence claim that presents your perspective and identifies the new knowledge that you will create.

A synthesis essay is NOT a summary or retelling of the plots of literary pieces.

### ***What is the point of it?***

The main purpose of a synthesis essay is to make insightful connections. Those connections can show the relationship(s) between parts of a work or even between two or more works. It is your job to explain why those relationships are important. In order to write a successful synthesis essay, you must gather research on your chosen topic, discover meaningful connections throughout your research, and develop a unique and interesting argument or perspective

### ***How do I start?***

#### **Step 1: Narrow a broad or general topic to a specific topic**

In a short essay, completely covering a large topic is impossible, so picking a specific, focused topic is important. For example, the broad topic of global warming would need to be narrowed down to something more specific, like the effects of automobile exhaust on an ecosystem.

## **Step 2: Develop a working thesis statement**

A working thesis statement should include a rough idea of your topic and the important point you

want to make about that topic. Writing this statement at the top of a rough draft or outline and looking at it often can help you remain focused throughout the essay. However, the thesis statement that you begin with is not set in stone. If you find that your essay shifts topic slightly, you

can change your thesis in later drafts so that it matches your new focus.

## ***How do I set it all up?***

A synthesis essay should be organized so that others can understand the sources and evaluate your comprehension of them and their presentation of specific data, themes, etc.

The following format works well:

### **The introduction** (usually one paragraph)

1. Contains a one-sentence statement that sums up the focus of your synthesis.

2. Also introduces the texts to be synthesized:

(i) Gives the title of each source (following the citation guidelines of whatever style sheet you are using);

(ii) Provides the name of each author;

(ii) Sometimes also provides pertinent background information about the authors, about the texts to be summarized, or about the general topic from which the texts are drawn.

### **The body of a synthesis essay:**

This should be organized by *theme*, point, similarity, or aspect of the topic. Your organization will be determined by the assignment or by the patterns you see in the material you are synthesizing. The organization is the most important part of a synthesis, so try out more than one format.

Be sure that each paragraph:

1. Begins with a sentence or phrase that informs readers of the topic of the paragraph;

2. Includes information from more than one source;

3. Clearly indicates which material comes from which source using lead in phrases and in-text citations. [Beware of plagiarism: Accidental plagiarism most often occurs when students are synthesizing sources and do not indicate where the synthesis ends and their own comments begin or vice versa.]

4. Shows the similarities or differences between the different sources in ways that make the paper as informative as possible;

5. Represents the texts fairly--even if that seems to weaken the paper! Look upon yourself as a synthesizing machine; you are simply repeating what the source says, in fewer words and in your own words. But the fact that you are using your own

words does not mean that you are in anyway changing what the source says.

### **Conclusion.**

When you have finished your paper, write a conclusion reminding readers of the most significant themes you have found and the ways they connect to the overall topic. You may also want to comment on things that it was not possible for you to discuss in the paper and end on an insightful note.

Student sample below: Scoring 5+/6

## **Appearance is Not Always What it Appears to Be**

by Alex Choi

There are many things in the world that makes life convenient and pleasant; yet, these would not exist without the process of production. The poem “Ice Palace”, written by Canadian poet Margaret Atwood, is a great example that shows the result and the process behind the finished result. The poem explores the front and back stage of a hotel. The “Ice Palace” may appear as a perfect place, but there are many behind-the-scene situations that oppose the first impression of the palace. Both poems, “Ice Palace” written by Margaret Atwood and “What Keeps Mankind Alive” by William S. Burroughs, show that the appearance is not always what it always appears to be.

The first look of the palace is flawless; the speaker paints a very pleasant and warm picture of the hotel. “[T]he heavenly bed” (12) sounds very restful. Instead of using other words that describe the feeling of restfulness, like comfortable, relaxing, or cozy, the speaker chooses the word ‘heavenly’ to emphasize the flawlessness of the bed. The poem also mentions “the all-/you-can-eat breakfast” (12-13). Food is one of the essentials of human life. The phrase ‘all-you-can-eat’ emphasizes the incessant amount of food that is being provided by the palace to the people. Yet, there are more to the palace than just a restful bed and abundant food. The heavenly bed and all-you-can-eat breakfast are just few of the luxuries people can enjoy at the paradise. During the stay at the palace, the “[i]nvisible hands” (13) “clean out the wad of hair/[people] left in the porcelain shower” (17-18). This quote portrays that no matter how much people mess up the room, it gets restored without effort. Everything gets perfected “when [people are] not there” (20). In other words, people only see the perfection, abundance, and cleanliness of the castle and nothing else. This place is where the visitors are treated like true kings and queens.

To the visitors, everything is perfect, but the palace is not paradise to everyone. The poem connotes that there are others in the castle than those enjoying the stay: “Where are

the bodies that were once/attached to all those hands?" (23-24). The invisible hands that magically create this perfect paradise for the visitors of the palace are not magic themselves; the hands have bodies, which are the people behind the scene that puts in effort to perfect the castle. Moreover, the speaker shows that these people behind the scene do not stay in the paradise but stay somewhere else: "Do not look/in the last and smallest room" (30-31). The speaker notes that the people behind the scene, or staff, stay in a small room where one must not 'look'. The poem is telling not to look into the room because the sight is disturbing and will spoil people's illusion of the palace: "Backstage it's always carnage." (25). The backstage is where all the filth from the heavenly rooms end up. Because of the perfection that the staff is trying to create, the backstage where the staff works depicts carnage. The hotel to the staff is neither pleasant nor restful. It is a place of battle and struggle for the staff; the carnage is for staff only.

There are two sides to the ice palace as discussed above. This existence of two sides, dualism, appears at the very beginning of the poem as well. The title "Ice Palace" hints about the dualism. On the one hand, palace connotes good, flawless, wealthy, and noble feelings. On the other hand, ice connotes cold, indifferent, apathetic, and wintery feelings. The speaker may have titled the poem differently: beautiful palace, heavenly palace, or 'marzipan' palace. However, by naming the poem "ice palace", the poet shows that the palace is not what it appears to be. It is a castle but a castle with no warmth, only luxury. The poet also uses the word "demiparadise" (1) because ice palace is a paradise to those who visit the place but not for those who work there. In the ice palace, the invisible hands are doing all those heavenly work just because those are their jobs. They have no sympathy, love, or interest about the people who uses the room, and neither does the people, who use the room, have any sympathy, love, or interest about the invisible hands. This connects back to the idea that the palace is ice not gold or anything more pleasant. The poet finally shows that this ice castle is not the only place that has this contrast between front and back stage: "Another Ice Palace. Another demiparadise" (1). This explains that this hotel is not the only place that has this dualism but that dualism is everywhere. Where there is pleasantries and convenience, there are people who put in effort to create this.

Even in the second poem, "What Keeps Mankind Alive", mentions the fact that the "[f]ood is the first thing" (9). The speaker suggests to "sort out the basic food position/Then start . . . preaching" (4-5). There are uncountable numbers of people around the world desperately needing food support. The speaker uses sarcasm to emphasize how the governments are not doing their jobs properly: "thanks to his aptitude/For keeping his humanity repressed" (16-17). The speaker 'thanks' the authorities for keeping the 'humanity repressed'. Unlike what the authorities' words, there are "millions . . . daily tortured/[s]tarved, silenced and oppressed" (14-15). On the one hand, the world seems as

English 11 Honours

Ms. Shin

if everyone is living in a fine environment, where they have basic essentials for human life. However, in reality, millions of people are being 'tortured' because they do not have all the basic essentials for human life. Authorities use those millions of people to make other people's life more convenient and pleasant: "Mankind is kept alive by bestial acts." (19)

Even if something may seem like there is no price for it, there is always a price for everything. One must see behind the goods that one has and enjoys in life because the appearance can never be everything. The poet Margaret Atwood implores the readers of her poem "Ice Palace" of seeing the both sides of things. Margaret Atwood uses examples around the world to define her point of view, but William S. Burroughs speaks straight out to define his point of view. His poem "What Keeps Mankind Alive" shows how the authorities trick its citizens with false painted speeches which differ from reality. As both poems show, people should appreciate the depreciation in the backstage world that creates the beauty and perfection in the visible world.