

Summarizing:

“When you summarize something you boil it down to its essence, picking out the major points or ideas and restating them in a succinct way” (The New Century Handbook 2).

- Identify key points (words, phrases, ideas).
- Put the thoughts in your own words, condensing information as you go.
- Check the summary for accuracy. Have you been fair to the author’s intent?
- Create lists or tables as appropriate.
- Document the source. Place author’s actual words in quotation marks and cite page numbers.

Caution: Separate summary from *interpretations*. Summaries are *not* opinions or interpretations. Summaries capture the essence of the *author’s* intention, not yours.

Analyzing:

“When you analyze something you have read or heard, you mentally divide it into its parts, such as main claim, sub-claims, tone, audience, purpose. Then, you look for any relationships there might be among the various parts. [. . .] decide how the [parts contribute to the whole]” (New Century 2). Interpretations are analysis and may include opinion.

Caution: Analysis, in this sense, focuses on *one* text. Synthesis, on the other hand, is summary and analysis of *multiple* texts.

Synthesizing:

Readings on a similar topic have, as John Gage says, a “dialectical” relationship. To explore those dialectical relationships, one must examine an issue from a variety of perspectives, not simply pro or con. Synthesizing, then, “involves approaching several sources of information with an eye to finding the *relationships* among them. When you synthesize, you seek to articulate the ways in which sources are related” (New Century 2). This might be accomplished by examining definitions and by comparing ideas through similarities and differences. When you synthesize, pay attention to and evaluate each author’s stance in relation to the others. What bias occurs? What is at stake for each author?

- Do any essays/articles agree or disagree on any points?
- Does one essay/article provide background for another?
- Does one essay/article take up where another leaves off?
- Does one essay/article provide general ideas that apply to the more specific information of the other essays?
- Does one essay/article provide an example of some idea discussed in another essay?
- Do any common ideas or viewpoints run through all the essays/articles?