



Writing 101 – Synthesizing Sources

Putting Research to Work for You

How Sources Are Used (BEAM)

- **BACKGROUND:** backstory or contextual information that sets the scene for your project or that your audience will need to follow your ideas; facts and information that establish the situation or issue; definitions of terms and concepts that may be unfamiliar to your audience. Usually non-controversial.
- **EXHIBIT** or evidence derived from exhibits: examples, explanations, and evidence you present for analysis; documents, data, field observations, direct experience, expert testimony. In the PAE, scholarly and personal sources are used.
- **ARGUMENT:** varying perspectives and scholarship surrounding the topic; the critical academic conversation; claims, concepts, and theories advanced by experts; counter-arguments or counter-exhibits that show the topic is complex. Usually from scholarly sources such as articles and papers.
- **METHOD:** sources on which you have modeled your inquiry process, idea development, or writing. (Often not directly cited but acknowledged in notes.)

Synthesizing Sources

1. Evaluate

- Is it relevant to my research question or main idea?
- How will my readers respond? Is it appropriate for my academic audience?
- Is it credible, accurate, and timely? What do other sources say about this one?
- Is there a particular bias or stance and, if so, is it appropriate for my purpose?
- Does it fit the scope of my inquiry? Is it neither too specific nor too general?
- Is anything missing? Is important background, explanation, evidence, or expert testimony still needed? Do I need to do more research?

2. Interpret (BEAM)

- What's the main idea? What do I understand this to be saying?
- How does this material address my research question?
- How does it address my main ideas, what I am trying to say?
- Does this source say something that disagrees with another source? Which do I believe? Why? Will I need to address the counter-argument/point? How?

3. Examine

- How do the parts of my research fit with my inquiry, and what I want to say?
- Are there common patterns among my sources? What do they seem to suggest about the topic?
- Are there controversies or disagreements? Which do I believe? Will I need to address other views?
- What main ideas or concepts can be summed up? What sections seem important, complex, or specific enough to paraphrase? Is there anything the author says better than I can say myself, that stand out, that might serve my purpose best as a direct quote?
- How does my personal experience fit with my academic research? What memories, experiences, or ideas of my own are reflected in, supported by, or refuted by my sources?

4. Integrate

- Is there a good reason to use each source? Am I including only sources that are useful, that do something to help me say what I want to say?
- What do I want to say, so far? Do I have something to say or have I lost interest? Do I need to rethink the project, change direction or do some more research?
- Is the research working for me, helping rather than overpowering my own voice? Is there room for my exploration, evaluation, and reflection, for what I have discovered, how my ideas have formed or changed, what I still wonder?
- Has my focus question changed? Has my main message or main idea changed? If so, how will I shift direction to respond?