

Exercise 2: Synthesize!

This exercise is intended for first-year rhetoric and/or composition students. I developed it during my MA studies at Missouri State University. The learning objectives are to identify key components of research sources and the process of quick summarization in a small group environment. At this point in the semester, students have begun to investigate a potential topic for a research paper.

Prior to class, students are asked to bring in three sources discovered in their research. These can be in printed or electronic form. The class is then paired up and provided with a handout, which is a page divided vertically into three columns. Specifically, one for each source, with a column header giving space for the source name, followed by a label of “key points”. Students are then given 30-inutes to share their sources, summarize them, identify key points, and then be prepared to synthesize them. The results of the synthesis are then made the subject of that week’s individual writing assignment.

Too often, with undergraduates, I see them moving from summary to summary in their research papers, rather than providing a true synthesis of their sources. I have found this exercise effectively teaches synthesis, while also giving them a boosted ‘head start’ on their individual research project.