

## LUC WRITING CENTER- “HOW TO WRITE A SYNTHESIS ESSAY”

A synthesis essay compares and contrasts two or more authors’ opinions on the same, or similar subjects. This requires careful examination of the pros and cons of both authors’ arguments as well as determining how they agree and/or disagree with each other. If you’re writing any essay, especially a synthesis essay, the following format might help you significantly in structuring your argument:

### *Topic Paragraph:*

1. Your first sentence should **situate the issue within a certain context**, possibly also giving the **full names of the authors/pieces** that deal with a **common issue/ask a similar question/theme**. Start by listing a **few similarities** between the two pieces.
2. Your second sentence should be about the **first of the two authors**: mention the **author by last name only**, providing **relevant background details such as profession, cultural or ethnic identity, etc.** and then briefly describe what this person **argues** in the piece they wrote and **why**.
3. Your third sentence should be about the **second of the two authors** and do exactly what you did in the second sentence for the first author.
4. Your final sentence should be your **thesis**, which should mention **both authors** and **highlight differences between them**, telling your reader **how their pieces are different** in terms of **tone/meaning/argument/style/use of rhetorical devices, etc.** (whatever you are focusing on) and briefly **stating why you think that is**.

**Note:** There is no need for proof or quotes in the topic paragraph. Instead, you must write a brief, but descriptive statement of what your argument will be. Don’t keep the reader guessing by using vague phrases such as “Hurston agrees with King’s perspective on racial relations, but her argument contains differences.” Instead say “While Hurston agrees with King that African-Americans urgently require equal rights, she focuses less on the social implications of racism and more on how discrimination both offends and empowers her on an emotional level.” **That’s a good, clear thesis!**

### *Subsequent Paragraphs:*

There are two ways to write a synthesis essay, the “Braiding Method,” which compares both authors’ perspectives on an issue in each paragraph, or the “French Braiding Method,” which describes one author’s perspective on an issue in one paragraph, then describes the other author’s contrasting perspectives in the next paragraph. Just like French braiding, the latter method is more complicated than the simpler way of writing essays, but the result can be a more thorough and well-thought out essay.

### *“Braiding Method” Important Skill: Be Succinct and Clear*

If you are looking at both authors in each paragraph, they both need to appear in your topic sentence at the top of each paragraph. This topic sentence functions like an inverted thesis. It tells the reader what you are going to argue in each body paragraph. Spend 2-3 sentences on each author, introducing, using, and explaining brief quotes or summarizing their arguments. Then write your conclusion sentence, which provides the “takeaway,” or point you just proved using quotes, summary, etc.

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### ***“French Braiding Method:” Important Skill: Keep Returning to the Other Author***

If you are discussing one author per paragraph, remember that each two paragraphs you write must deal with the same point (i.e. what do both King and Hurston think about African-American self-image?).

Spend one paragraph talking about how one author addresses an issue, using quotes and/or summary.

Then transition to the second paragraph by demonstrating how the second author either agrees or disagrees with the first author’s opinion, which you just discussed.

Go on to discuss what the second author thinks, referencing the first author’s opinion again in your conclusion sentence (is it different from the second author’s? the same? Explain how)

The third paragraph will introduce the first author’s opinion on another point, and so on.

### ***Conclusion:***

Both authors and their briefly stated opinions should be referenced in your conclusion, along with your own evaluation of which opinion is most informative, informed by their arguments.

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