

**LUC WRITING CENTER –  
“THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUMMARY RESPONSE, RHETORICAL ANALYSIS,  
AND SYNTHESIS ESSAYS”**

*Hint: The Clue is in The Title of Each Essay!*

**Summary Response:** If you’ve ever wondered why **summary response** essays are assigned in college courses, keep reading! You might already be familiar with summary, the method by which you read a work or source, then state the work or source’s basic concepts or “point” in your own words, without quotes or plagiarizing. *The purpose of summary is to sum up what the author is saying so that your reader doesn’t have to read the work or source for themselves, but can trust your assessment of the main points.* Summary response goes a step further by not only summing up the author’s argument fairly and comprehensively, but also allowing you to respond to and evaluate the author’s argument.

When writing a summary response essay, summarize the work or source in the first half of your essay and then respond to its argument in the second part of your essay. This allows your reader to understand the work or source you will engage with BEFORE hearing your perspective on the issue. *The response portion, on the other hand, is understood to express your own approval, criticisms, or outright rejection of the argument and its premises that you have just summarized.* In the response, you can fully exercise your own power as a thinker, researcher, and debater.

**Rhetorical Analysis:** Like a summary response essay, a **rhetorical analysis** essay also critiques and evaluates an argument by summarizing the main point, or thesis of a work or source.

*However, while stating what the author intends to prove or argue, a rhetorical analysis essay is intended to analyze the rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos), along with rhetorical tone and other devices intended to provoke a response in the reader through clever use of language.*

As a reader, critique, and writer, your job is to figure out the motives of the author, decide if the use of the rhetorical appeals and devices is effective or ineffective (i.e. does it produce the desired effect in the reader?) and either recommend that your reader believe the argument or not.

Should readers trust an argument on gun control containing facts and figures on gun ownership, demographics, and other statistics or one containing graphic descriptions of people being shot? Sometimes the answers aren’t easy or straightforward – that’s where you, as the investigator, come in! Remember to clearly explain your interpretation of colorful words and rhetorical appeals so that your reader can follow your argument.

**Synthesis:** Again, as with a summary response essay, you are required in a **synthesis** essay to summarize a work or source in your own words with two key differences: 1) *This time you can also introduce and explain quotes along with summarizing the author’s argument in your own words,* and 2) *Instead of only quoting and summarizing one work, you are examining and critiquing two or more works at the same time* (“synthesis” means “blend”).

In a synthesis essay, you will first summarize and quote the argument and point of each work or source, then compare and contrast the two arguments, examining their differences or similarities, and finally evaluate both to see which argument is more convincing. If you disagree with both arguments, you should explain why in specific terms. Perhaps you don’t agree with a thesis, find proof to be faulty or lacking in one argument, or distrust how much pathos or ethos appears in the work or source. The possibilities are endless, so trust your summary response and rhetorical analysis skills!