Synthesizing Sources

FAQ

*What is a synthesis?* (p. SS-1)

*What is the difference between a synthesis and a summary?* (p. SS-1)

Every day, we are bombarded with information—in our personal and professional lives, in our reading, on television, on the Internet, and elsewhere. In order to process this information and to make wise choices about what to believe, we must integrate the new information with the information we already know. Similarly, in academic settings, writers must *synthesize* source information, combining borrowed material with their own ideas in order to express an original viewpoint. Synthesis allows writers to explore relationships among ideas and to arrange those ideas in a logical and meaningful way. For this reason, knowing how to synthesize sources is an important skill.

Understanding Synthesis

Any piece of writing that integrates material from several sources is a *synthesis*. Synthesizing sources involves smoothly weaving summaries, paraphrases, and quotations into your discussion, balancing material from two or more sources with your own knowledge and experiences to explain or analyze a concept. While summaries and paraphrases rephrase a source’s main ideas, and quotations reproduce a source’s exact language, syntheses use all these strategies to create an essay or paragraph driven by the writer’s own ideas. An effective synthesis establishes a context for the source material it uses, showing the relevance of each source to the writer’s points.

The following synthesis was written by a student as part of a research paper. The student effectively uses paraphrase and quotation to define the term *outsider art* and to explain it in relation to a particular artist’s life and work.

**Sample Student Synthesis**

According to *Raw Vision* magazine, Bill Traylor is one of the foremost American artists of the twentieth century (Karlins). Born on a cotton plantation as a slave in the 1850s and illiterate all his life, Traylor is one of the leading American “outsider” artists—self-taught

Chapter prepared by Karen Mauk.
artists who do not consider themselves artists but create works for themselves rather than for the public (Glueck). Originally coined by Roger Cardinal, the term **outsider art** can be defined in the following way:

Outsider art is the category which identifies and encompasses the work done by those who are by virtue of their mental condition, illiteracy, confinement, behavioral defect and the like, excluded from the wide mainstream of artistic creation. Few have formal training of any kind. They do their work absent of the self-consciousness that necessarily comes from being an artist in the ordinarily accepted circumstance. The French call it “Art Brut.” But here in America, “Outsider Art” also refers to the work done by the poor, illiterate, and self-taught African Americans whose artistic product is not the result of a controlling mental or behavioral factor but of their untaught and impoverished social conditions.

( Louis-Dreyfus iv)

As a Southern African-American man with few resources and little formal training, Traylor fits the definition of an outsider artist whose works are largely defined by the hardships he faced.

As the preceding example demonstrates, an effective synthesis weaves selected passages of source material into a discussion, drawing relationships between sources and the writer’s own ideas. (Note that sources will seldom agree on all major points; often, sources may not even seem, at first, to have much in common. It is your job to weave various writers’ ideas into a coherent whole.)

**Writing a Synthesis**

To synthesize source material, you must discover, within often seemingly unrelated sources, important connections that tie the sources together and relate them to your own knowledge and experiences. For this reason, when you write a synthesis, you must think critically about your topic and your sources, trying to better understand that topic and your own point of view.

The first step in synthesizing material is to determine how your sources are alike and different, where they agree and disagree, and whether they reach the same conclusions. As you identify connec-
tions between one source and another or between a source and your own ideas, you will develop your own perspective on your subject. It is this viewpoint, summarized in a thesis statement (in the case of an entire paper) or in a topic sentence (in the case of a paragraph), that becomes the focus of your synthesis.

**QUESTIONS FOR MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN AND AMONG SOURCES**

- What positions do the sources take on the issue?
- What key terms do the sources identify and define?
- What background information do the sources provide?
- How do the sources address their audiences?
- How do the sources agree?
- How do the sources disagree?
- What evidence do the sources use to support their assertions?
- How do the sources address opposing points of view?
- How do the sources organize their main ideas?

As you write your synthesis, develop your points one at a time, using your sources as support. Identify each source, naming its author(s) and title, and use identifying tags as well as transitional words and phrases to help your readers follow your discussion. Carefully analyze and interpret source material as it applies to your points, being fair and avoiding bias. Finally, remember to document all summaries, paraphrases, and quotations that you synthesize, making certain that your readers are able to differentiate your ideas from those of your sources. Failure to document sources is plagiarism.

**CLOSE-UP**

**Synthesizing Visuals**

As you write and revise your synthesis, you may decide to use one or more visuals to support your points. You may want to include a visual that appears in one of your sources, or you may decide to create a visual (for example, a photograph or a table) that illustrates your ideas and strengthens your synthesis. Be sure to clearly explain the visual's relationship to your points and to document it appropriately.

**CLOSE-UP**

**Synthesis across the Disciplines**

Writing assignments often require you to synthesize information across various disciplines, making connections among different kinds of sources in different academic and professional fields. For example, an introductory philosophy assignment might ask students to write on a topic in bioethics, requiring a synthesis of various sources from the fields of philosophy and biology.
EXERCISE 1*

Read the following three passages on autism, a developmental disability, and write a one-sentence summary of each source's position on the topic. Then, for each source, list one point of agreement and one point of disagreement between the source's position and the position of another source. Finally, write your own one-sentence response to each source's position. Refer to the sources as Source A, Source B, and Source C.

Source A

The following passage is excerpted from an autobiography by an autistic scientist and educator.

I think in pictures. Words are like a second language to me. I translate both spoken and written words into full-color movies, complete with sound, which run like a VCR tape in my head. When somebody speaks to me, his words are instantly translated into pictures. Language-based thinkers often find this phenomenon difficult to understand, but in my job as an equipment designer for the livestock industry, visual thinking is a tremendous advantage. . . .

One of the most profound mysteries of autism has been the remarkable ability of most autistic people to excel at visual spatial skills while performing so poorly at verbal skills. When I was a child and a teenager, I thought everybody thought in pictures. I had no idea that my thought processes were different. In fact, I did not realize the full extent of the differences until very recently. At meetings and at work I started asking other people detailed questions about how they accessed information from their memories. From their answers I learned that my visualization skills far exceeded those of most other people.


Source B

The following is excerpted from an art education magazine article exploring the relationship between autism and the visual arts.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act defines autism as “a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3, which adversely affects a child’s performance.” Many children with autism are mainstreamed into regular classrooms, and an art environment can be challenging, yet incredibly stimulating for the children.

Often, children with autism learn visually and are enriched by classrooms with bright, colorful pictures and vivid images. Allowing the kids to be creative, especially in the art environment, is one of the most important aspects of teaching children with autism. (McDevitt, Krista. “Small Wonders.” Arts & Activities 136.3 [2004]: 16.)

*Exercises 1 and 5 are modeled after the synthesis essay question on the 2007 Advanced Placement English Language and Composition Exam.
Source C
The following is excerpted from an environmental health journal article explaining a possible cause of autism and arguing for more research.

Fetal and early childhood exposures to industrial chemicals in the environment can damage the developing brain and can lead to neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism, attention deficit disorder (ADHD), and mental retardation. Insufficient research has been done, however, to identify the individual chemicals that can cause injury to the developing brains of children. . . .

During development, the brain undergoes a highly complex series of processes at different stages. Any interference—for example, from toxic substances—that disrupts those processes can have permanent consequences. This vulnerability lasts from fetal development through infancy and childhood to adolescence. Research has shown that at low levels of exposure, environmental toxicants such as lead and mercury can cause subclinical but still important adverse effects, such as decreases in intelligence or changes in behavior. (“A Silent Pandemic: Industrial Chemicals Are Impairing the Brain Development of Children Worldwide.” Journal of Environmental Health 69.7 [2007]: 64–65.)

The following sections describe two common types of syntheses: the explanatory synthesis and the argumentative synthesis. These two categories can overlap; depending on your purpose, your synthesis may incorporate both approaches.

The Explanatory Synthesis
An explanatory synthesis (whether essay or paragraph length) defines and explains concepts or processes to help readers see relationships and understand ideas. The purpose of an explanatory synthesis is to inform, conveying factual information as accurately as possible. Writers often find that integrating one or more visuals in an explanatory synthesis helps them to efficiently explain difficult or complex information.

In a first-semester composition class, Jay Gilman, a computer science major, was given the following assignment:

Choose an area related to your major that you think others would benefit from learning more about. Then, using three sources as support, write a paragraph that defines and explains this topic to an audience unfamiliar with the field. Summarize, paraphrase, and quote source material as appropriate, using MLA (Modern Language Association) documentation style.
Computers have already changed our lives. They carry out (at incredible speed) many of the everyday tasks that make our way of life possible. For example, computer billing, with all its faults, makes modern business possible, and without computers we would not have access to cellular services or cable or satellite television that we take for granted. But computers are more than fast calculators; they are also equipped with “intelligent” technology that has transformed the fields of medicine, agriculture, and manufacturing, just to name a few.

One technology writer defines artificial intelligence (AI) as “a field that attempts to provide machines with humanlike reasoning and language-processing capabilities” (Havenstein). The farming community is just one example of an industry that is now using AI technology: with new, high-tech agricultural sprayers that treat crops precisely and accurately, farmers are able to improve the output and quality of their yield (“More Machine Intelligence”). AI has also made possible certain medical advances, for example, helping scientists to generate human tissue, bone, and organs for patients in need (Howell).

Given the importance of AI technology, it seems certain that computers will change our lives even more in the future.
The Explanatory Synthesis

This synthesis effectively defines the term artificial intelligence (AI) and uses information from three short articles to explain the concept and briefly describe its contributions to various fields. The writer introduces his paragraph with a summary of computer technologies familiar to his readers and then moves into a discussion of AI with a topic sentence that presents his position.

The sources selected for the above synthesis could have been used far less carefully and effectively. In the following ineffective explanatory synthesis, source material dominates the discussion, all but eliminating the writer’s own voice.

Ineffective Explanatory Synthesis

Heather Havenstein defines artificial intelligence (AI) as “a field that attempts to provide machines with humanlike reasoning and language-processing capabilities.” As reported in IndustryWeek magazine, the farming community is using AI technology by adding machine intelligence to agricultural sprayers, dramatically increasing their application efficiency and improving the output and quality of crops (“More Machine Intelligence”). In the medical field, scientists have used AI to “grow skin, cartilage, bone, ears and bladders” (Howell). AI technology has changed our lives in important ways, and it seems obvious that it will continue to do so in the future.

This example does not include a topic sentence that states the writer’s position; instead, it presents source material in a haphazard and careless way, giving readers the impression that the paragraph is just a collection of other people’s ideas. Additionally, the paragraph lacks supporting examples and has a vague conclusion.

■ EXERCISE 2
Using the responses to the three sources that you wrote for Exercise 1, develop your own ideas about the issue and summarize them in a topic sentence. Then, write a paragraph explaining how your position is similar to and different from the ideas of the sources.

■ EXERCISE 3
Examine a group of advertisements (on television or in print or electronic media) that either target the same group of consumers (children, for example) or focus on a similar product (teeth whiteners, for example). Then, integrate at least three ads in a paragraph-length synthesis that explains the message the ads are trying to convey.
The Argumentative Synthesis

An argumentative synthesis (whether essay or paragraph length) attempts to convince readers to accept a debatable, or even controversial, position on an issue. The purpose of an argumentative synthesis, like any argumentative essay, is to persuade readers. In this type of synthesis, writers synthesize sources to develop a chain of logic that supports their assertions.

In a second-semester composition class, Angela Gray, a psychology major, was given the following assignment:

Choose a controversy in your major that interests you. Then, use the college’s online databases to locate source material on this topic. Integrate four print sources and one visual source in an essay that takes a stand on the issue. Summarize, paraphrase, and quote source material as support, using MLA (Modern Language Association) documentation style.
Spirituality in Therapy:
Should Secular Psychologists Accommodate Religious Patients?

The field of psychology is based on constant exploration of the characteristics that make a human being unique. One of these characteristics is the belief in a higher power (and the accompanying desire to please a deity). Religious people have motives for their actions that are different from those who are secular, and psychologists can benefit from understanding these motives. In fact, it is possible that the use of spirituality in a therapy setting (with the patient’s consent) would be beneficial not only to religious patients, but also to the psychologists who treat them.

At present, religious people seeking help must deal with their problems from either a spiritual or psychological perspective. A great many Americans, however, believe in a deity and are looking for help from people who share their religious convictions (Young, Wiggins-Frame, and Cashwell 47). For this reason, many people are inclined to go to a member of the clergy for counseling because they think that the psychologist may disregard the idea of God. Such patients may receive inadequate support from clergy who are not equipped to deal with complicated psychological problems. In such cases, the use of spirituality in psychotherapy sessions may enable religious individuals to receive more effective treatment.
The need to believe in a higher power can sometimes cause great emotional distress in clients. Psychotherapist and scholar P. Gregg Blanton suggests that the postmodern era has caused people to feel disconnected from God (69), resulting in feelings of isolation and abandonment that may, in turn, lead people of faith into therapy. Lacking support or a sense of direction, religious individuals may become convinced that they are “seeking something besides God” (Blanton 69).

Patients who experience spiritually directed therapy may be better able to cope with stress and stress-induced illness. A recent study shows that rates of depression are lower in college students of faith than in their nonreligious counterparts (Phillips and Henderson 169). For this reason, psychotherapists may find it helpful to integrate spirituality into their treatment.

Of course, the incorporation of spirituality into counseling is not without problems. Most psychologists do not receive formal training in spirituality and have traditionally “neglected” spiritual matters in counseling (Young, Wiggins-Frame, and Cashwell 47). As noted by Young, Wiggins-Frame, and Cashwell, many people of faith distrust the field of psychology because of the divide between science and religion (47). They may even resist counseling, a situation that can lead to inadequate treatment or to no treatment at all.

However, despite the fundamental differences between the social sciences and religion, psychologist Diane Langberg sees benefits in including spirituality in psychological treatment not only for the patient, but for the therapist as well. Langberg states that all people are...
The Argumentative Synthesis

**The Problem**

**Spiritual Direction.** Operating from a Christian worldview, instead of a postmodern one, spiritual direction has a very different view of the problem. Because of the Fall of humankind, people have fallen away from their awareness of and responsiveness to God’s Spirit in their souls. The image of God is hidden, because they have fallen into an overly separated sense of themselves (Edwards, 2001).

We are not actually separate from God. According to spiritual direction, the problem is that we do not realize that we are united with God. Our usual experience is that we are “here” and God is “there” (May, 2004). As we lose sensitivity to the spiritual level, “we can cease to feel the touch of the Mystery that bonds so near us in order to communicate with us” (Grotton, 1952, p. 20).

May (2000) suggests that we feel separate from God for two fundamental reasons. First, he quotes St. Teresa from The Interior Castle: “We just don’t understand ourselves or who we are” (p. 51). The second reason is that we have become attached to things other than God. The root of our problem is that we are seeking something besides God.

**Symptom Differences and Subjective Religiousness**

Earlier we hypothesized that students who describe themselves as more religious will exhibit fewer symptoms of depression than those who are less religious or not at all religious. To test this hypothesis, the authors of this study examined respondents’ mean symptom scores for each response category of the question measuring religiousness. The results of an ANOVA comparing these means appear in Table 2. The statistically significant value of F (F(4,493) p<.05) denotes that there is more variability in symptoms of depression between the categories of the religiousness variable than within them. The analysis also showed that respondents who see themselves as “very,” “some,” or “a little” religious have significantly fewer symptoms of depression than those who declare that they are “not at all” religious (p<.05). This is consistent with the hypothesis outlined above. Those who report that they are “very” religious rank the lowest on the depression scale (mean=28.2), followed by those who say “some” (mean=29.6), and those who say that they are “a little” religious (mean=32.3). The differences between these three groups, however, are not statistically significant. This suggests that the presence or absence of religious devotion in the population predictor variable matters more than the intensity of that devotion.

**Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations for Depression by Level of Religiousness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td>2326</td>
<td>38.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>4609</td>
<td>39.6*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Little</td>
<td>1080</td>
<td>36.1*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>7231</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

F (4,493) = 41.93, p<.05

* Mean difference from non-religious significant at p<.05

Until recently, many mental health professionals neglected issues related to religion and spirituality in their work with clients (Bergin, 1980, 1983; Frame, 2003; Henning & Tinnell, 1982; Hodge, 2001; Richards & Bergin, 1997; Schulte, Skinner, & Claiborn, 2002; Stille, Hope, & Schumacher, 1996; Zimbardo & Pargament, 2006). Part of the explanation for excluding religion and spirituality from clinical work came from the conflict between the scientific, objective perspective of psychology and the transcendent, subjective aspects of religion (Burke et al., 1990; Lovinger, 1984; Pettitson, 1978; Press & Keller, 1993; Royse, 1985; Reissner & Lawlor, 1992; Wallwork & Wallwork, 1990). The influence of Freud and, more recently, theorists such as Ellis and Skinner on psychology and the issues of separation of church and state in American politics and culture (Frame, 2003; Kelly, 1995; Myers & Willard, 2003) also contributed to the chasm between counseling on the one hand and religion and spirituality on the other.
“image bearers” and incorporate into themselves the emotions and knowledge they perceive in others (259). The difficult work of therapists involves experiencing, along with their patients, the impact of their patients’ stories and the distressing images evoked by those stories. Langberg suggests that offsetting such images with “the image of God” can offer new hope to psychologists and patients alike (262).

Perhaps one reason for hope lies in the growing support among psychologists for the inclusion of spirituality in therapy (Blanton 68). Therapists are, after all, human beings with emotional, psychological, and spiritual complexities. Many of them, as Table 1 shows, also hold religious beliefs of their own.

**Table 1 Differences in Religious Denomination by Professional Background**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Psychologists</th>
<th>Marriage and Family Therapists</th>
<th>Social Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>35.85</td>
<td>433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>20.49</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>15.11</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>16.32</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>17.96</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding. *Ten studies. **Six studies. ***Three studies.


Religious therapists may be better able to identify with religious patients because they understand the ways
All of us are image bearers, mirrors. When we talk with one another we see reflected in each our histories, our country or locality of origin, the physical characteristics of our parents. If you listen carefully to me for a long enough time you may see the reflection of my political preference, what I have read lately, or the areas with which I struggle. We read such reflections all the time in the lives of our patients. We often see there the reflection of things they have never explicitly stated. Our ability to do so makes them nervous. They think we can read minds.

Now I believe this principle runs even deeper. I believe that because we as humans are soft, malleable, and permeable, that we not only reflect but we also assimilate! To assimilate means to take something up and make it part of yourself. We carry within that which we reflect. We are image bearers, not simply image reflectors. If you stand in front of a mirror you see yourself reflected there. But if you walk away the image is gone. Nothing within the substance of the mirror is any different than before you were reflected in it. Mirrors do not assimilate your image. I believe that human beings, over time, take into their very substance the things that they reflect. They hold such reflections preserved within themselves.

was lost (for the image of God in us was shattered). He came to set free the captives and to make all things new. I believe that you and I as believers first, and as therapists, second, are to live in such a way that we too explain the Father to others. While bearing the image of suffering in ourselves we are to habitually reflect the Father so as to serve as a redemptive force in this world. I believe that is true because Scripture calls us to walk as Jesus walked. That means that if we want the work that we do to restore and make new, if we want who we are to reflect the image of Christ to others, then we ourselves must incarnate who God is. We must learn to bear God's image in our persons. We must learn to be under God's influence more than any other influence, for to live with God is to become like God.

During the past decade, mental health professionals have become increasingly interested in integrating religion and spirituality into psychotherapy (Griffith & Griffith, 2002). A more specific focus that has received greater attention recently is the integration of spiritual direction and psychotherapy (Tan, 2004). Literature calling for cross disciplinary dialogue between spiritual direction and psychotherapy has mushroomed in recent years (Barrette, 2005; Beek, 2003; Gillan, 2004; Goehringer, 2003; Johnson, 2004; Moon & Benner, 2004; Rogers, 2004; Shea, 1997; Sperry, 2004; Tan, 2004; Tedale, Doehring, & Lorraine-Poirier, 2004).
in which religious beliefs make a person unique. In fact, according to a recent survey of American Counseling Association members, many therapists actually regard spiritual knowledge as important to their work (Young, Wiggins-Frame, and Cashwell 49). Blanton also argues throughout his article that spiritually directed therapy closely mirrors the popular and proven method of family narrative therapy.

An effort to include spirituality in traditional therapy may help eliminate religious people’s doubts about psychotherapy. Although spirituality and psychology may not seem to be compatible, integration of the two is possible. Not only would an integrated approach help to strengthen mutual understanding on both sides of the science-religion divide, but it could also help to serve clients and to expand the field of psychology. The incorporation of spirituality into psychological treatment could lead to better therapeutic techniques that might benefit patients with a range of problems.

Despite possible objections, the incorporation of spirituality in a psychotherapeutic setting could have significant benefits for both patient and psychologist. Religious individuals with emotional and psychological problems could seek treatment without worrying about their religious beliefs being challenged. Psychologists could receive more trust from the religious community. In this way, the field of psychology could benefit from the incorporation of spirituality; cooperation with the religious community would help to expand the field, and ultimately, psychologists would have another tool with which to explore mind, body, and spirit.
Summary of Young, Wiggins-Frame, and Cashwell table data

![Table 2: Mean Importance and Percentage of Agreement Scores for All Competencies](image)

**TABLE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity to communication... (5)</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>4.64-4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limits to own understanding... (6)</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>4.64-4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful of spiritual themes... (8)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>4.54-4.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in self-exploration... (3)</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>4.21-4.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess relevance of spiritual domains... (7)</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>4.02-4.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use client's beliefs in treatment... (9)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3.92-4.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe practices in a cultural context... (2)</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>3.71-3.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain the relationship... (1)</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3.71-3.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable self/development... (4)</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3.40-3.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 505. CI = confidence interval.
*Complete list of competencies is available in the Appendix.
This synthesis effectively argues for the benefits of incorporating spirituality into therapy. It smoothly weaves information from four academic articles and a table from a fifth article into the writer’s discussion. The writer clearly states and develops an argumentative thesis on a debatable topic, synthesizing source material to develop her points. She considers and refutes opposing arguments, and she concludes the essay with recommendations that take the multiple perspectives of her sources into account.
EXERCISE 4
Using the topic sentence that you wrote for Exercise 2, write a paragraph-length explanatory synthesis. Be sure to organize your synthesis around your own ideas, using source material to support each point.

EXERCISE 5
Read the following five sources. Then, write an essay-length argumentative synthesis that integrates at least three of the sources. Develop your own perspective on the topic of women and advertising and summarize it in a clear thesis statement. Summarize, paraphrase, and quote from sources, using MLA parenthetical reference style.

Source A
The following excerpt comes from the introduction to a photo essay that depicts the complex nature of American girl culture today.

Girl culture today is driven largely by commercial forces outside the family and local community. Peers seem to supplant parents as a source of authority; anxiety has replaced innocence. Despite the important and satisfying gains women have made in achieving greater access to education, power, and all forms of self-expression, including sexual, we have a sense of disquiet about what has happened to our girls.

In the 1990s, a warning about girls was sounded by some bestselling books such as Meeting at the Crossroads by Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan and Reviving Ophelia by Mary Pipher. These powerful discussions alerted the nation to the psychological difficulties of growing up female in a society that silences and stifles girls even in social and educational settings thought to be enlightened. Other studies confirmed that women really are the “stronger sex”—that is, until puberty, when their vulnerability to physical and mental health problems increases. In The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls, I argued that our current cultural environment is especially “toxic” for adolescent girls because of the anxieties it generates about the developing female body and sexuality. On the basis of my reading over one hundred personal diaries written by adolescent girls between 1830 and 1980, I concluded that as the twentieth century progressed, more and more young women grew up believing that “good looks”—rather than “good works”—were the highest form of female perfection. The body projects that currently absorb the attention of girls not only constitute a “brain drain,” but can also threaten mental and physical health.


Source B
The following passage is excerpted from a book exploring the relationship between advertising and consumer behavior.
The gap between boys and girls is closing, but this is not always for the best. According to a 1998 status report by a consortium of universities and research centers, girls have closed the gap with boys in math performance and are coming close in science. But they are also now smoking, drinking, and using drugs as often as boys their own age. And, although girls are not nearly as violent as boys, they are committing more crimes than ever before and are far more often physically attacking each other.

It is important to understand that these problems go way beyond individual psychological development and pathology. Even girls who are raised in loving homes by supportive parents grow up in a toxic cultural environment, at risk for self-mutilation, eating disorders, and addictions. The culture, both reflected and reinforced by advertising, urges girls to adopt a false self, to bury alive their real selves, to become “feminine,” which means to be nice and kind and sweet, to compete with other girls for the attention of boys, and to value romantic relationships with boys above all else. Girls are put into a terrible double bind. They are supposed to repress their power, their anger, their exuberance and be simply “nice,” although they also eventually must compete with men in the business world and be successful. They must be overtly sexy and attractive but essentially passive and virginal. It is not surprising that most girls experience this time as painful and confusing, especially if they are unconscious of these conflicting demands. (Kilbourne, Jean. Can’t Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel. New York: Simon, 1999. 129–30.)

Source C

The following is excerpted from a study analyzing the depiction of women in magazine advertisements since 1955.

This study was designed to examine the portrayal of women in advertisements in a general interest magazine (i.e., *Time*) and a women’s fashion magazine (i.e., *Vogue*) over the last 50 years. The coding scheme used for this analysis was based on the one developed by sociologist Erving Goffman in the 1970s, which focuses primarily on the subtle and underlying clues in the picture content of advertisements that contain messages in terms of (stereotypical) gender roles. The results of this study show that, overall, advertisements in *Vogue*, a magazine geared toward a female audience, depict women more stereotypically than do those in *Time*, a magazine with the general public as a target audience. In addition, only a slight decrease in the stereotypical depiction of women was found over time, despite the influence of the Women’s Movement. . . .

In this study, a longitudinal approach was taken to analyze the portrayal of women in a general interest magazine and a women’s fashion magazine from 1955 to 2002. The sample consisted of the issues of *Time* in the first 4 weeks of January and June in the years 1955, 1965, 1975, 1985, 1995, and 2002 as well as the January and June issues of *Vogue* in the same years. The months of January and June were selected to avoid a bias in the sample based on the time of the year the advertisements were published. (It could be expected, for example, that advertisements in magazine issues of the summer months include more instances of “body
display.”) By including summer as well as winter issues, the sample was expected to reveal greater insight regarding the overall picture of the way women are portrayed.

Only advertisements that showed one or more women, either in the presence or absence of one or more men, were coded in this study. The coding categories were conceptually defined as follows:

1. **Relative size.** When both men and women are present, the man is taller and/or bigger than the women and takes up more space in the picture.

2. **Function ranking.** When both men and women are present, the man serves as the instructor or performs an executive role.

3. **Feminine touch.** The woman touches herself (e.g., hair, face, lips) or her clothes in an unnatural way or uses her fingers and hands to trace the outline of an object, cradle it, or caress its surface. This type of touching is to be distinguished from the utilitarian kind, which involves grasping, manipulating, or holding objects.

4. **Ritualization of subordination.** The woman lowers herself physically in some form or other of prostration; canting postures are associated with acceptance of subordination. This includes lying or sitting on the ground, bed, or sofa—whether in the presence of another person or not, canting of the head or entire body. Also included in this category is a woman being embraced by a man, who inhibits her movement, or a woman leaning against a man’s shoulder or holding on to his arm for support, dependent on, and subordinate to the man present.

5. **Licensed withdrawal.** The woman removes herself psychologically from the situation at large or is shown mentally drifting from the physical scene, leaving her disoriented and dependent on the protectiveness of others. This is indicated by an expansive smile or laughter, covering the face or mouth, or withdrawing her gaze from the scene at large. Being involved in a phone conversation also falls into this category.

6. **Body display.** The woman is shown wearing revealing, hardly any, or no clothes at all, which is often associated with sexualized images of women.

7. **Movement.** The woman is inhibited in her movement, by being wrapped in a blanket for example, which limits the amount of control she can exert on the environment.

8. **Location.** The woman is shown in a domestic environment, such as the kitchen, bedroom, or bathroom. This also includes depicting the woman in a decontextualized, that is, unidentifiable, environment that does not allow for any purposeful activities.

9. **Objectification.** The woman is portrayed in such a way as to suggest that being looked at is her major purpose or function in the advertisement.

A total of 1,374 advertisements were coded for this study. . . . Percentages of the total number of advertisements that met the criteria of each of the coding categories are shown in Table II. Overall, 78% of all advertisements contained stereotypical images of women in at least one of the categories.
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Table II. Overall Stereotyping in Each Coding Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>% of advertisements falling into the category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relative size</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Function ranking</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine touch</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritualization of subordination</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensed withdrawal</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body display</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectification</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Source D

The following is a magazine advertisement for women’s fashion.

Source E

The following is excerpted from a book about the impact of popular notions of feminine beauty.

When this book first came out [in 1991], general public opinion considered anorexia and bulimia to be anomalous marginal behavior, and the cause was not assumed to be society’s responsibility, insofar as it created ideals and exerted pressure to conform to them—but rather personal crises, perfectionism, poor parenting, and other forms of individual psychological maladjustment. In reality, however, these diseases were widely suffered by many ordinary young women from unremarkable backgrounds, women and girls who were simply trying to maintain an unnatural “ideal” body shape and weight. I knew from looking around me in high school and at college that eating disorders were widespread among otherwise perfectly well balanced young women, and that the simple, basic social pressure to be thin was a major factor in the development of these diseases. . . . Disordered eating, which was understood to fit a disordered ideal, was one of the causes of the disease, and not necessarily, as popular opinion of the day held, a manifestation of an underlying neurosis.

Now, of course, education about the dangers of obsessive dieting or exercise is widespread, and information about eating disorders, their addictive nature, and how to treat them is available in every bookstore, as well as in middle schools, doctors’ offices, gyms, high schools, and sororities. This, now, is progress.

Yet, on the down side, those very disorders are now so widespread, in fact, almost destigmatized by such intense publicity that they have become virtually normal. Not only do whole sororities take for granted that bulimia is mainstream behavior, but models now openly talk to Glamour magazine about their starvation regimes. A newspaper feature about a group of thin, ambitious young women talking about weight quotes one of them as saying, “Now what’s wrong with throwing up?” And “pro-an” Web sites have appeared on the Internet, indicating a subculture of girls who are “pro-anorexia,” who find the anorexic look appealing and validate it. This is definitely not progress.