When you synthesize sources in a document-based question, you combine them to help support your original claims and subclaims. In an English class, "synthesis" has often meant to put sources (or authors) in conversation with each other, and in so doing, create a veritable "parlor room" that allows you, the student, to enter into the conversation.

Such an approach often suggests a listening component in writing, and it is not uncommon for students addressing the synthesis task to compose sentences such as:

> Author X supports Author Y with regards to
> _____.
>
> **OR**
>
> Unlike Author X, Author Y argues_____.

Such deliberate juxtaposition of sources reminds you of the need to address the interpretive focus of secondary sources, which is the basis of one of the SAQs on the AP History exams. For the DBQ, however, students are only asked to "[support] an argument in response to the prompt using at least four documents." This resource will provide some ideas on how to "use" the documents in various ways that will not only support but strengthen your argument.

Please note: *Nowhere* in the rubric is there a statement about the requisite number of examples or sources in a body paragraph, so think of synthesizing sources as a choice from your writing toolkit.

Method #1: Combination

By adding multiple sources in support of an original sub-claim, you strengthen your argument. Beyond a "more the merrier" approach, such combinations allow you to cover wider swaths of geography, time, demographics, or events. Indeed, the absence of combining multiple sources in support of a claim is a potential fallacy. If there is only one example to support a claim, how do you know that it's not an exception? An aberration?

Furthermore, the act of combining suggests straightforward transitional language among examples:

> - Also,…
> - Another example,…
> - We see _____ again with _____.

Such transitional moves help create body paragraphs that reflect several examples in support of your claim, thereby earning greater credibility to your argument.

Method #2: Responding to an Opposing View

This method comes closest to the SAQ prompt with different interpretations. What happens when one of the sources does not support your original claim? Do you simply ignore it? If so, you run the risk of a less effective response, and the directions for the DBQ prompt encourage the use of the majority of the sources to purposefully offset a one-sided argument.

Furthermore, this act of combining requires a different set of transitional words, especially if you wish to maintain a cohesive paragraph. Such moves include:

> - Unlike,…
> - On the other hand,…
> - However,…

What makes bringing in the opposing example more complicated is that—unlike method #1—there is an additional step, and that is your response to the opposing

example. You wouldn't write a paragraph that ends with an example that supports a different view; that would be similar to a cliffhanger ending that says "stay tuned for next week's episode."

Therefore, you have three choices in the final move of this paragraph:

- **refutation**—where you invalidate the opposing view [through evidence and reasoning]

- **rebuttal**—a "yes, but" approach that invites a broader, revised perspective [again through evidence and reasoning]

- **concession**—an acknowledgment of the legitimacy of the opposing side [through evidence and reasoning, often with the next paragraph]

Method #3: A Nod to Point of View

While you have four choices in how to analyze documents, using point of view is a first cousin to the synthesis task taught in rhetoric classrooms. More than bias, point of view incorporates the element of position [occupation, role, stakeholder] and perspective [sentiment, stance, value.] Such distinctions are useful, for just because someone holds a key position, such as a Supreme Court justice, doesn't necessarily mean that they will all hold the same perspective on a particular issue.

Incorporating point of view in your writing encourages two writing moves. The first is using appositives, or the information that allows you to introduce potential bias. For example, you could say "Sonia Sotomayor, Supreme Court justice, argues _____…"; however, what if you wrote "Sonia Sotomayor, Supreme Court justice appointed by Barack Obama, argues _____…"? Notice how the appositive helps introduce that position and perspective, and by understanding the potential bias, you set yourself up for a second move.

And that move is identical to that which you may do on your synthesis task in AP English Language and Composition.

> Author X [choose one: **supports/challenges**] Author Y when it comes to _____.

As with the first two methods, the way you combine

your points of view will create well-reasoned body paragraphs that effectively back up your central argument with a clear line of reasoning.

Method #4: A Nod to Audience

Understanding audience impact or expectations also provides an opportunity to synthesize different sources in a way to support your argument. One of the four choices you have in analyzing sources—the understanding of audience—assumes an awareness of the historical situation and purpose, so it's not like these other two areas of analysis are less integral. Indeed, understanding audience is akin to the paint job at the end of a construction project—it is the last thing that occurs. It is only after you understand the historical situation, purpose, and point of view that you can discern the role of audience in analyzing a document.

Minimally, you would identify audience as a demographic: e.g., farmers, democratic republicans, women. More broadly, an effective approach is to identify audience *values*: e.g., farmers struggling to ward off government support during the Dust Bowl; democratic republicans worried about the voice of farmers being heard; women tired of lax child labor laws around the country.

One clear way to demonstrate a "complex" argument is to understand how different audiences respond to key issues, and the writing moves appear as such:

> To audiences who value _____, such a message would mean.
>
> **OR**
>
> Not all audiences would agree with _____, as demonstrated by _____.

Note how the second response invites a greater synthesis of sources. By incorporating the ways in which different sources impact different audiences, you achieve a level of complexity with your evidence, commentary, and line of reasoning.

Last Thoughts

Your ability to use sources in the service of your argument will be enhanced by any of these four approaches to synthesis. A review of the sample responses in CROSS-**CURRENTS** reveals these different examples of synthesis.

In particular, Chapter 6 of CROSS**CURRENTS** contains a sample DBQ about the influence of Enlightentment principles on the French Revolution. See which methods of synthesizing documents you can identify in the sample student essay response found on p. 183.

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