
USING A SYNTHESIS MATRIX

- When you seek to answer a research question, one of your goals is to determine the current state of knowledge by asking, “What is known (or not known) about this issue?” As you search for information on your topic, it is important to understand that information is created and published in a variety of formats, or types of sources, and are used for different purposes. It's best to use a variety of information types to ensure a wider scope and greater depth of coverage. Please see the **Knowledge, Publication and Access Cycles** to help illustrate this.
- A deep examination of literature on your topic requires you to gather and synthesize the most relevant subtopics to come to a greater understanding of the larger issue. A **synthesis matrix** works very much like a jigsaw puzzle. The individual pieces (arguments) must be put together in order to reveal the whole (state of knowledge).
- A **synthesis matrix** is a chart that allows a researcher to sort and categorize the different arguments presented on an issue. Across the top of the chart are the spaces to record sources, and along the side of the chart are the spaces to record the main ideas on the topic at hand. As you examine your first source, you will work vertically in the column belonging to that source, summarizing each *significant idea* presented in the work. Follow a similar pattern for your following sources.
- Reflect on your readings and identify main ideas. As you examine new sources, determine if these support or refute existing ideas in your matrix. You might also find new main ideas that you need to add to your list. The matrix is complete when you feel confident you have found sufficient information to answer your question (or proof that it cannot be answered 😊).

CREATING YOUR SYNTHESIS MATRIX

Begin your chart by labeling the columns both horizontally and vertically. Label the columns across the top of your chart with the author's last name or with a few keywords from the title of the work. Then label the sides of the chart with the main ideas that your sources discuss about your topic. As you read each source, make notes in the appropriate column about the information discussed in the work, as shown in the following chart.

Tips for your matrix:	Main Ideas (record in each column to the right)	Source #1	Source #2
Not all sources will apply to ALL of your main ideas, but keep the focus on your research question!			
Pull out relevant information, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quotes• Statistics• Paraphrased information			
If using print-based sources, be sure to include page numbers for any information that is to be cited!			