What does it mean to synthesize sources?

- Synthesis (prefix “syn”) means to bring together.
- By synthesizing sources, you are able to process what your sources say and add your own voice to the “conversation.”
- Synthesizing sources can mean summarizing, paraphrasing, and/or quoting source material, thinking critically about it, comparing and contrasting the material among sources, and then adding your own voice through analysis and evaluation.
To begin, read source material closely, annotate sources, and reflect critically about bias, evidence, ideas, etc.

Next, start to make comparisons among sources. Do the sources contradict each other? Do the sources complicate or extend the ideas? Do the sources exhibit strengths or weaknesses in arguments or ideas that need to be discussed? Question sources.

Finally, participate in the conversation with sources by analyzing and evaluating what is interesting, significant, revealing, or unusual about the ideas, style, evidence, etc.
Ways to synthesize in your writing

- Quote, paraphrase, and/or summarize sources in order to think critically about the material
- Analyze sources throughout your writing; as you present ideas from sources, comment on them:
  - Tell what is interesting or unusual to you and why
  - Tell why the source material should matter to the reader
  - Explore interesting or unusual connections among sources
- Question and explore new ideas
- Let your sources “speak” to each other (while one source argues X, the other argues Y, which reveals Z)
- Add your voice to the ongoing “conversation”
Introduction and Attribution of Sources

The first time you introduce a source, give full name, title, and credentials to establish the credibility of your source.

- In the article, “Dimensions in Agency in Lincoln’s Second Inaugural,” Andrew Hanson, Georgia State University Assistant Professor, argues that Lincoln’s Second Inaugural speaks to individuals today on a more personal level (224).

After the introduction of the source, use last name only (and page number, if possible) to attribute information to the source. If you use the title and author’s name in the text of the essay, you only put the page numbers in parentheses. If you do not use the author’s name in the sentence, it must also appear in the parentheses with page numbers.

- Hanson says, “There are, however, those speeches like the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural that practice their persuasion on audiences beyond the immediate exigency. They persist, they talk to us still, and their agency endures” (224).

When synthesizing sources, use connective words and phrases (similarly, on the other hand, however, moreover, in the same way, in contrast, etc.)
Compare and contrast interesting or unusual ideas among sources to offer your readers insights into patterns and contradictions within ongoing “conversations” about topics.

While Robert Ferguson, Professor at Columbia University, argues that Lincoln’s speeches have lasting value based on the credibility of the speaker, Andrew Hanson, Georgia State University Assistant Professor, argues that Lincoln’s Second Inaugural speaks to individuals today on a more personal level, which means that each reader and era endows the speech with its cultural, rhetorical, and political value. For example, in the article, “Dimensions in Agency in Lincoln’s Second Inaugural,” Hanson says, “There are, however, those speeches like the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural that practice their persuasion on audiences beyond the immediate exigency. They persist, they talk to us still, and their agency endures” (224). Although both arguments have value, better use of the rhetoric of Lincoln’s speeches comes from a combination of understanding the times in which they were said and an analysis of why that makes his words applicable today.

Red (source one’s voice)
Green (student’s voice)
Purple (source two’s voice)
According to Susan Albers in *Eating Mindfully*, “American culture often emphasizes the extreme opposite of leisurely dining, inherent in the phrase ‘fast food’” (12). Albers’ focus on consciously (versus subconsciously) eating leads to interesting discussions about food habits in America. On the other hand, Mary Donkersloot, R.D., embraces the fast food culture for Americans in *Quick and Healthy Eating At Home and On the Go*, by teaching readers to make healthy choices to fit busy American lifestyles. Both programs focus on healthy food choices, but Albers’ book makes a valiant effort to change the way we think before, during, and after we eat.

- Red (source one’s voice)
- Green (student’s voice)
- Purple (source two’s voice)
In order to synthesize well, you need to know your sources well. Read them several times, take notes, and look for ideas that stand out to you as interesting, significant, or strange.

Make unusual connections among sources instead of just dumping data into your essay. Offer ideas from sources, and then analyze those ideas. Highlight source material in a draft to see if you are synthesizing well.

Ask questions about your sources: What is missing? What is different among them? What is the same among them? Why are connections among sources interesting?

Offer your readers fresh insights into source material; be the teacher/scholar.