

## Synthesis Matrix

A matrix, in general, is a grouping of information in a categorized and organized way. For each educational field, it means something more or different. **A synthesis matrix, specifically, is an organizational chart which a researcher creates as a strategy to help them write a literature review for their paper.**

### The Process of Synthesis Matrix Creation

1. **Topic selection:** The topic is either selected by the writer or by your instructor. If you have a literature review/synthesis matrix, your topic may have been already selected for you. **However, if you need to select a topic, it is helpful to narrow down your interests to one field of research, read about it in general, and then ask a question which does not seem to be answered in the readings that you completed and which you would like to answer yourself.**
2. **Synthesis/Literature review mapping:** Once you have decided on your topic, you need to **identify the subtopics that you would like to address and which help you explore said topic.** In doing so, you understand that a literature review is not a summary of sources but a consolidation of subtopics that come together like a puzzle and reveal the state of knowledge of this topic (what we know and what we should know about it).
3. **Source selection:** With the understanding that your literature review is not a summary, **you are able to pick sources that provide pieces of information about your subtopics and enable you create links among them.** For example, you can include such a sentence in your literature review: Researcher A suggests that X is true. Researcher B agrees with Researcher A, but argues that the effects of X may be different from those suggested by Researcher A. As you read literature for your review, remember to take notes in order for you to be able to easily pick your sources for the matrix.
4. **Matrix creation:** Since your literature review is not a summary, it might be difficult for you to organize it and write it with a smooth flow. This is why you need a matrix.

The synthesis matrix will allow you to categorize your different subtopics and arguments for each one with their respective sources. Hence, your matrix contains two parts: Across the top of it are the spaces to include sources, and along the side of it are the spaces to record the main points of argument on the topic at hand. The information included for each source is either a summary, a quotation or a paraphrased statement/argument.

5. **Using the matrix:** Once you have filled out your matrix, you will be able to look at all your sources together. You will be able to identify which ones can be compared and/or contrasted, which ones that are in agreement and which ones are in disagreement. Some may be complementary and add information to others etc. In order to identify these patterns of synthesis, you can do some color-coding whereby you color arguments that go together in the same color and so on and so forth.

After your matrix is ready, you will be able to write a coherent literature review that is neither a summary of sources nor patchwork.

### Template of a Synthesis Matrix

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

	Source #1	Source #2	Source #3	Source #4
Main Idea A				
Main Idea B				