Synthesizing Research

What is synthesis?
Synthesis occurs when you use evidence from multiple sources within one paragraph or section of a paper to support a larger objective argument or conclusion based on a body of research. The goal of synthesis is to support claims by providing a holistic sense of the research available. This means a writer must not only cite multiple sources, but must make relationships between sources clear. For example, a writer should be clear about which sources completely support the writer’s conclusion, which slightly disagree or deviate from the conclusion, which offer a new angle or approach to the conclusion, and how sources/findings might agree or disagree with one another. Synthesis words (see below) are used to emphasize relationships among sources. After reading a synthesis, a reader should feel they have a comprehensive understanding of the research findings and how they do or do not support the writer’s conclusion.

Synthesis is not:
- Summarizing individual sources one by one
- Ignoring conflict in research findings or only presenting one side

What does synthesis look like structurally?
The argument or conclusion the writer has formed based on research findings appears in the topic sentence of the paragraph. Multiple sources are used throughout the paragraph to support the claim made. Within the paragraph, a writer may use multiple sources within each sentence to show how a body of research supports the claim.

Synthesis Words:
Agrees; Concurs; Supports; Also; Similarly; Disagrees; Conversely; In opposition to; Diverges from; Differs; Expounds on; Adds to; Expands on; Clarifies

Example (synthesis words bolded):
Based on the review of literature, patient satisfaction increases when nurse-to-patient ratios are kept low. Several studies found that patient satisfaction scores increased when nurses were responsible for fewer patients (Harper & Collins, 2015; Mendes, 2016; Newport, 2014; Tippins & Clark, 2016). Only one study differed, reporting that reducing nurse-to-patient ratios had no impact on patient success, but this study’s sample was too small to make it statistically significant or generalizable (Jones, 2013). Harper & Collins (2015) and Mendes (2016) found that a ratio of 1:1, as recommended by the American Nurses Association, increased patient satisfaction scores by more than 20%. Supporting their findings, qualitative research reported that patients felt “very happy” and “highly satisfied” when assigned their own nurse (Tippins & Clark, 2016, p. 2). While studies concur that a 1:1 ratio is ideal and increases patient satisfaction, research also shows that when this isn’t realistic, even reducing nurse-to-patient ratios to 1:2 can have a statistically significant positive impact on patient satisfaction scores (Newport, 2014).