Writing a Synthesis
Teacher’s Notes.

Summary: This worksheet guides learners step-by-step through the process of writing a synthesis in a group. Learners thus training the skills of careful reading, note-taking, paraphrasing/summarizing, and critically synthesizing information from different source texts. Collaborative team-work is also practiced.

Example texts (~C1 level) are given on the topic of native vs non-native speaker English teachers; a topic of relevance to all language learners which also has potential to spark lively debates and discussions among students.

The guide worksheet can also be used with any other source texts on topics if interest/relevance to learners, adapted to their current language level.

The procedure is self-explanatory.

Level: The step-by-step guide can be used at any level from intermediate upwards – the instructions are written in fairly basic words, with all but a few understandable at B1 level on the CEFR. The instructions also contain a few basic words from the AWL (4%), thus making them suitable for learners new to EAP and academic discourse.

The example texts used here are aimed at C1-level learners, but also vary slightly in difficulty. According to CEFR and AWL vocabulary profiles, they rank in order of difficulty (from easier to more difficult) as follows:

- The Native Factor in ELT Materials [understandable to B2 learners]
- Native English-speaking teachers: always the right choice?
- The non-native speaker teacher
- The native-speaker fever in English language teaching (ELT) [also suitable for C2 learners]

This variation in level of the sample texts allows for differentiation among stronger/weaker students within a class group, e.g. if students are assigned to work on the text the teacher deems most suitable to their level.

Texts of this length are probably best prepared (Step 1+2) at home.

Adaptation: The step-by-step guide can be used with any set of text on a topic of interest to the learners. The texts could be shorter, or broken down into smaller chunks, and/or use simpler vocabulary, as appropriate.

See the Using English for Academic Purposes website by Andy Gillen: http://www.uefap.net/writing/writing-reporting/writing-reporting-synthesis for an example on a general science topic and using shorter texts. This website also includes ‘answers’, showing the colouring and organising of notes very clearly.


The article reports a study into the efficacy of teaching synthesis writing explicitly, which found that the group of students who received this explicit instruction performed better than a control group on the quality and organization of their syntheses, as well as how well they critically ‘mined’ the source texts for information. Anthony Schmidt summarises the implications of this research for our EAP teaching practice, highlighting that the process of reading, selecting information, and producing summaries and syntheses should be carefully scaffolded, and may work well as a collaborative learning task. Both of these aspects are covered by this Synthesis Writing worksheet.