

Creating a Source Synthesis Grid

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How can I synthesize source materials?

A common strategy for planning a research paper and synthesizing sources is **to create a research grid**. To create a research grid, follow these steps, and review the example on the bottom of the page. You can create your own grid in Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, or in a research notebook or journal.

- ⇒ Begin by developing a primary research question. A good research question should be open-ended. (The source materials you find may shape your overall argument/thesis).
- ⇒ Use the research question to begin researching the topic via the library databases.
- ⇒ As you read through source materials found in your search, note the words or ideas that repeat themselves; identify conflicts or contradictions in the information.
- ⇒ Make a list of how the research responds to your research question. Make sure your answers account for both the contradictions and repetitions you discovered. Turn this list into categories for your grid.
- ⇒ Create a grid using authors' names and categories as organizing features.
- ⇒ Fill in the grid with details from the sources. A grid allows a writer to group source material into specific categories. These categories can help the writer organize the paper into body paragraphs which synthesized sources to provide evidence.

Sample research question: What are some drawbacks of virtual learning at the college level?

Categories developed after review of research: Peer interaction, assessment and grading, technology issues, course completion, and student motivation.

Sample Grid

Author's Names	Peer Interaction	Assessment and Grading	Technology Issues	Course Completion	Student Motivation
J. Gillet-Swan (2017) "The Challenges of Online Learning"	"One-size-fits all approach" may negatively impact some students. (Isolated learners)	Online assessment directly linked to students' ability to use the technology	Some students may not be able to navigate the platforms.	Struggling students may "slip under the radar."	
S. Riegg Cellini (2021) "How Does Virtual Learning Impact Students in Higher Ed?"	Students feel less connected to peers and instructors.			Fully online students are less likely to graduate than similar students taking in-person courses.	Students have trouble focusing on their coursework.
D. T. Hue Dung (2020) "The Advantages and Disadvantages of Virtual Learning"	Lack of conditions for developing social interaction skills	Student fear of online assessment	Device and connectivity inequality	Difficulties acquiring and retaining course content	Students lack self-discipline