

## Instructor Notes

### Workshop on Synthesis and Working with Sources

#### Objective:

This in-class activity introduces students to the concept of synthesis and illustrates how to synthesize information in a paragraph through use of student writing. It provides students with an annotated model paragraph from a published paper that they can refer to while writing independently. *After this activity students will be comfortable with the concept of synthesis and be able to recognize synthesis in their own writing and the writing of others.*

#### Workshop:

- 1) Discuss the question “what is synthesis?” and what are the important attributes of “synthetic writing”.
- 2) Have students read each of the three paragraphs individually.
- 3) After reading, have students pair up to comment on the ways that the author succeeded and/or failed to achieve synthesis.
- 4) Have pairs share with the larger group.
- 5) Provide students with model paragraph from published paper, with annotations.

#### Sarah’s comments on paragraphs:

Paragraph #1: This paragraph starts out with a pretty clear topic sentence that promises to be synthetic. However, the paragraph has some problems after that. First, it summarizes a lot of points about how fire can affect the N cycle but most of these aren’t supported by cited evidence. Mostly, the paragraph is just citing a single study and the textbook, rather than synthesizing multiple sources of information. Second, not all of the points made in the body of the paragraph clearly relate to the topic of fire effects on N cycling. Third, the concluding sentence raises new issues that weren’t even discussed in the body of the paragraph – for example, how changes in the plant community composition caused by fire might change N cycling. This is a poor example of synthesis.

Paragraph #2: This paragraph doesn’t synthesize at all. It has no topic sentence and no concluding sentence. It basically lists a number of different studies, but doesn’t say anything about what those studies actually found, nor does it use the information from the different studies to draw conclusions about how climate change will alter species distributions. This is a poor example of synthesis.

Paragraph #3: This paragraph does a good job of stating a topic sentence, supporting that topic sentence with evidence from a variety of sources throughout the body of the paragraph, and drawing a conclusion based on the synthesis of the evidence. This is a good example of synthesis.