

How to answer a summarise and synthesise question

“In your English language exam, you'll be asked to summarise and synthesise two texts to show that you understand the meaning of the writing. This means you'll need to summarise by being able to give a brief explanation of what each text is about and synthesise by using information and examples from both texts in your answer. Let's summarise and synthesise these two texts about two different writers' relationships with their dogs.

Text one. “Daisy was stronger, faster, and more powerful than her compact size suggested. Our walks were a constant battle. She persistently strained against her leash, sniffing, twitching, searching. On this particular morning, she launched herself up a tree trunk chasing her favourite target, a squirrel. Her jolt wrenched me forward. I stumbled over a root and my head smashed into a low-slung branch.”

Text two. “He came in this morning in his usual style, which he appears to have founded on that of an American cyclone, and the first thing he did was to sweep my coffee cup off the table with his tail, sending the contents full into the middle of my waistcoat.”

An exam task could be something like this. Summarise and synthesise these two texts to compare the relationship each writer has with their dog. To summarise and synthesise, the first thing you'll need to do is to look for examples and information in each text relevant to the question.

Once you have found this information, you can use phrases such as “We can infer that” “This suggests that”, or “This implies that” to explain what you have found. For example, if we look at our two texts, we can infer that both dogs are out of control and cause their owners trouble. In the first text, we are told that Daisy was stronger, faster, and more powerful than her size suggests.

The use of the words battle and strained also implied that the dog is a challenge to control. Similarly, the dog in the second text is compared to a cyclone who proceeds to sweep a coffee cup off a table with his tail.

This implies that this dog also moves around the house in an uncontrolled way. In addition to these behavioural similarities, both dogs also seem to cause their owners trouble. In the first, we are told that the dog has wrenched the right forward, causing them to stumble and hit their head. Comparably, the second dog sweeps the contents of the coffee cup into the middle of my waistcoat, implying that the writer's clothes are now covered in coffee.

Notice how when comparing the text, I use words to signpost the comparison such as similarly comparably, and in addition to. If you are comparing two texts that are different, you can use words and phrases like alternatively or in contrast to begin a sentence about the difference. When asked to summarise and synthesise, the key is to use examples from both texts that support your points about the similarities or differences between them.”