

Technical Report: Synapse

LLM based system for Learning

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Abstract

Synapse is an LLM-based system designed to support university studies through the automatic generation of educational material. This report explores the system architecture, focusing on the integration of agentic design patterns such as **Retrieval-Augmented Generation**, **Reflection**; **Tool Use**, and advanced export functionalities.

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1 Introduction

The evolution of Large Language Models (LLMs) has opened new possibilities in the field of assisted education. However, the "naive" use of these models presents significant limitations: hallucinations, superficiality in responses, and a lack of adherence to specific study materials.

We created *Synapse* to solve these problems through an architecture that combines:

- **RAG:** To ground LLM responses in user-provided documents.
- **Reflection:** To improve the quality and correctness of generated flashcards through a draft-critique-refine cycle.
- **Tool Use:** By searching on the web to supplement user-provided knowledge (if provided) with up-to-date information from the web.
- **Exporting Capabilities:** To produce flashcards compatible also with the popular spaced repetition study tool Anki.

2 System Architecture

The system is built in Python and follows a modular service-oriented architecture.

2.1 Service Overview

The logical core resides in the `services/` directory, which decouples responsibilities:

- `ai_service.py`: Abstraction for interaction with LLMs (supports Google Gemini and local models via Ollama).
- `rag_service.py`: Handles document indexing, chunking, and vector retrieval.
- `reflection_service.py`: Implements the logic for the draft-critique-refine cycle of the flashcard generation.
- `web_search_service.py`: Provides additional context from the web when local documents are insufficient.
- `export_service.py`: Manages data conversion into interoperable formats (CSV, Anki).

2.2 User Interface

The graphical interface is built with **PyQt6**.

The UI structure (`ui/`) separates presentation logic ('`main_window.py`', '`subject_window.py`') from configuration dialogs ('`settings_dialog.py`').

3 Agentic Design Patterns: The Reflection Pattern

One of Synapse's main innovations is the implementation of the **Reflection** pattern. Instead of passively accepting the LLM's output, the system establishes a self-improvement cycle.

3.1 The Draft-Critique-Refine Cycle

The flashcard generation process follows three distinct phases, orchestrated by `reflection_service.py`:

3.1.1 1. Draft (Draft Generation)

The LLM is instructed to act as an expert in metacognition. The prompt imposes "atomic" rules based on Andy Matuschak's principles, requiring structured JSON output.

```
1 prompt = f"""You are an expert in learning and metacognition...
2 Follow these 5 ABSOLUTE RULES:
3 1. Focused: The question must address ONLY ONE concept.
4 2. Precise: It must not be ambiguous.
5 3. Consistent: The answer must be the only correct one.
6 4. Ask "Why": Prefer questions about implications.
7 5. Cognitive Effort: The answer must NOT be intuitive from the question.
8
9 Return the response in JSON format..."""

```

Listing 1: Prompt for draft generation

3.1.2 2. Critique (Critical Analysis)

In this phase, the system assumes an "adversarial" role. A second prompt asks the LLM to evaluate the newly generated draft. This is not a simple review, but a validation against specific criteria.

```
1 prompt = f"""You are an expert critic...
2 Evaluate the flashcard EXCLUSIVELY according to these 5 RULES:
3 1. Focused: Does it ask for a single concept? Or is it too broad?
4 2. Precise: Is it ambiguous?
5 3. Context: Is the answer correct and based ONLY on the context?
6 ...
7 Provide CONSTRUCTIVE criticism in 2-3 sentences."""

```

Listing 2: Prompt for critique

3.1.3 3. Refine (Refinement)

If the critique highlights defects (detected via keyword matching such as "not focused", "vague", etc.), the system invokes the LLM again, passing:

1. The original flashcard.
2. The received critique.
3. The original context.

The model is forced to produce a new version that specifically resolves the reported issues.

4 Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG)

The RAG module (`rag_service.py`) is the heart of Synapse's "memory". This technology overcomes the static knowledge limit of LLMs by providing dynamic access to user-uploaded documents (PDFs, slides).

4.1 How it works: A Simple Example

To understand the operation, let's consider a practical example. Imagine the user asks: "*What is the Reflection pattern?*".

1. **Retrieval:** The system converts the question into a numerical vector (embedding) and searches the database (Qdrant) for text fragments (chunks) from the PDFs that are semantically closest to the question.
2. **Augmentation:** The found fragments are inserted into the system prompt. The prompt becomes similar to:

"Use ONLY the following information to answer: [Text extracted from PDF: 'Reflection is a pattern...']. Question: What is the Reflection pattern?"

3. **Generation:** The LLM generates the answer based exclusively on the provided context, ensuring that the explanation is faithful to the study material and not generic.

4.2 Recursive Chunking

Retrieval quality depends drastically on how documents are divided (chunking). A naive approach, cutting text every fixed N characters, risks splitting sentences in half or separating related concepts, making the context incomprehensible to the LLM.

Synapse adopts a **Recursive Character Text Splitting** strategy, which aims to preserve text semantics by respecting the natural structure of language. The algorithm does not cut arbitrarily but tries to divide the text using a hierarchy of separators, in order of priority:

1. **Paragraphs (\n\n):** First attempts to divide text into complete logical blocks (paragraphs).
2. **Lines (\n):** If a paragraph is still too long to handle, it splits by lines.
3. **Sentences (. . .):** If necessary, it goes down to the single sentence level.
4. **Characters:** Only as a last resort does it cut a sentence in half.

This approach ensures that each "chunk" sent to the model contains, as much as possible, a complete and coherent thought, significantly improving the quality of generated responses.

4.3 Vector Store and Embeddings

The system uses **Qdrant** in embedded mode (local disk storage) to store vectors. This avoids the need for complex external servers to configure.

For embeddings, the system is hybrid:

- **Local (Ollama):** Uses models like `nomic-embed-text`, ensuring total privacy and offline operation.

- **Cloud (Gemini):** Uses Google APIs for high-performance embeddings (`gemini-embedding-001`) ideal for those without powerful hardware.

The search is performed via **Cosine Similarity**, with a configurable relevance threshold (default 0.25) to discard noisy results.

5 Web Search Integration

To ensure responses are always up-to-date and complete, Synapse integrates a web search module (`web_search_service.py`) that intervenes when local documents do not contain the necessary information.

5.1 Service Operation

The system does not limit itself to a simple Google search but uses a specialized tool for AI agents (in this case, **Tavily**) optimized for content extraction. The goal is not to provide links to the user, but to retrieve high-quality *raw context* to inject into the LLM prompt.

The process takes place in three steps:

- **Query Optimization:** The LLM reformulates the user's question into an optimized search query (e.g., from "who is the current president?" to "current president of Italy 2024").
- **Content Extraction:** The search engine visits the most relevant pages in parallel, removing ads, menus, and boilerplate, and extracting only informative text.
- **Context Aggregation:** Text fragments extracted from different sources are aggregated into a single context block passed to the LLM for final response generation.

5.2 Fallback Strategy

The service is designed to be resilient: 1. **AI Engine (Tavily):** Used as the primary source for its ability to aggregate and clean data from multiple web sources in real-time. 2. **Wikipedia API:** If the primary service is unreachable or not configured, the system automatically falls back to public Wikipedia APIs to obtain general definitions and concepts.

6 Export and Interoperability

To be truly useful, the generated material must be usable in daily study tools. The `export_service.py` service handles this need.

6.1 Anki Package Generation (.apkg)

The most advanced feature is the direct creation of packages for **Anki**, the most widespread spaced repetition software. The code interacts directly with Anki's internal SQLite database:

```

1 cursor.execute('',
2     CREATE TABLE notes (
3         id INTEGER PRIMARY KEY,
4         guid TEXT NOT NULL,
5         mid INTEGER NOT NULL,
6         ...
7         flds TEXT NOT NULL, -- Contains Front and Back separated
8         ...
9     )
10 ,,,)

```

Listing 3: Anki database structure creation

The system generates a valid .apkg file that includes:

- The database structure (`collection.anki2`).
- Card models (custom CSS for clean visualization).
- Decks organized by subject.

This allows the user to import hundreds of flashcards into Anki with a double click, maintaining formatting and tags.