2. Revise the summary below so that it more accurately reflects the original passage:

Original passage: Prior to the official acceptance of the low-fat-is-good-health dogma, clinical investigators, predominantly British, had proposed another hypothesis for the cause of heart disease, diabetes, colorectal and breast cancer, tooth decay, and a half-dozen or so other chronic diseases, including obesity. The hypothesis was based on decades of eyewitness testimony from missionary and colonial physicians and two consistent observations: that these "diseases of civilization" were rare to nonexistent among isolated populations that lived traditional lifestyles and ate traditional diets, and that these diseases appeared in these populations only after they were exposed to Western foods—in particular, sugar, flour, white rice, and maybe beer. These are known technically as *refined* carbohydrates, which are those carbohydrate-containing foods—usually sugars and starches—that have been machine-processed to make them more easily digestible.

Source: Gary Taubes, *Good Calories, Bad Calories: Challenging the Conventional Wisdom on Diet, Weight Control, and Disease.* Alfred E. Knopf, 2007, pp. xix-xx.

Summary: Another hypothesis was proposed based on decades of eyewitness testimony from physicians and the observations that these "diseases of civilization" didn't occur in isolated populations until they were exposed to Western diets of refined carbohydrates. Refined carbohydrates include sugar, flour, white rice, and maybe beer.

Synthesizing

In much academic writing, writers must do more than consult sources for relevant information. They must also bring together information or ideas from a variety of sources and synthesize the material into a coherent discussion that is relevant to the task at hand. Not only is synthesizing material from several sources an essential task in most academic writing, but it also lends depth to the writing. Consider this passage from *The Young and the Digital*, an analysis of the role of media in the lives of young people today:

> In years past, social scientists expressed serious apprehension about the media content, especially violent and sexual imagery, that's exposed to young children and teenagers. And though violent and sexual themes in media continues to be a serious topic of debate, a growing amount of attention is shifting to the proliferation of screens in homes and in young people's lives. There is rising anxiety about the sheer amount of time children and teens spend with media and technology. According to a 2006 study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, kids spend between six and eight-and-a-half hours a day with media. Today, playtime for many young children usually involves time with a screen.

As they observe their parents' connection to mobile phones, BlackBerrys, laptops, and other electronic gadgets, many young children mimic those behaviors. We often hear, and for good reason, that young people are leading the migration to digital. But in many homes across America, parents are unwittingly teaching their kids to be digital. In the midst of the marketing and selling of the digital lifestyle, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children's daily screen time be limited to one to two hours.

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Source: Watkins, S. Craig. *The Young and the Digital.* Beacon Press, 2009, p. 50.

In this passage, author S. Craig Watkins draws on several sources to make his main point about the increasing amount of time young people spend using digital media. Notice that Watkins cites two specific sources (a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation and a recommendation from the American Academy of Pediatrics), but the first few sentences of the paragraph provide an overview of an important development (the shift in attention from questionable media content to the amount of time children spend with media) that Watkins likely gleaned from several additional sources. In other words, Watkins is synthesizing ideas and information not only from the two sources he cites but also from other sources that he consulted while researching his topic. As this example suggests, synthesis can be extremely useful when a writer is working with complex subject matter and many different sources.

Effective writers follow **three basic guidelines when synthesizing ideas and information:**

- Keep larger goals in mind.
- Identify a main point.
- Use of source material that you need.

Keep Larger Goals in Mind

When working with several different sources, especially in a longer project on a complicated topic, it can be easy to lose track of your reasons for consulting the specific sources you found. As you review sources and identify relevant information or ideas, remind yourself of the main goal of your project and identify how the section you are working on relates to that main goal. For example, the passage on page 633 from Watkins' book *The Young and the Digital* is taken from a chapter titled "The Very Well Connected: Friending, Bonding, and Community in the Digital Age," in which Watkins examines the increasingly central role digital media play in the social lives of young people. The passage focuses on the increasing amount of time young people devote to digital media, a point that supports Watkins' analysis that digital media have become one of the most significant factors in how young people manage their social lives. Notice that in synthesizing

material from his sources to make his point about the time young people devote to digital media, Watkins also connects that point to his larger point about the social impact of digital media.

Identify a Main Point

Source material is often varied and complicated, and when synthesizing this material you must identify what is relevant to the task at hand. In effect, you are managing information from different sources and connecting them to make a point. That task is easier for you if you keep focused on a main point. Here's an example in which a writer synthesizes information from several very different sources to make a point about the longstanding debates about vegetarianism:

> Debates about the efficacy of vegetarianism follow us from cradle to wheelchair. In 1998 child-care expert Dr. Benjamin Spock, who became a vegetarian late in life, stoked a stir by recommending that children over the age of 2 be raised as vegans, rejecting even milk and eggs. The American Dietetic Association says it is possible to raise kids as vegans but cautions that special care must be taken with nursing infants (who don't develop properly without the nutrients in mother's milk or fortified formula). Other researchers warn that infants breast-fed by vegans have lower levels of vitamin B12 and DHA (an omega-3 fatty acid), important to vision and growth.

Source: Corliss, Richard. "Should We All Be Vegetarians?" *Time*, 15 July 2002, p. 48+.

In this passage, the author draws on at least three separate sets of sources: (1) material about the 1988 controversy surrounding Dr. Benjamin Spock's recommendations about feeding young children a vegetarian diet; (2) the American Dietary Association's recommendations; and (3) nutritional studies of infants who were breast-fed by vegans. Although these sources all relate to the topic of the impact of vegetarianism on children, each has a different focus. The author brings them together to make a single main point, which is stated in the first sentence of the paragraph. The information from each source is clearly related to that main point. As a result, the author makes it easy for a reader to make sense of the information from these different sources.

Use Only the Source Material You Need

When working with multiple sources, you might find a great deal of relevant material that is interesting and seemingly important. But don't overwhelm your reader by trying to synthesize information from too many sources at once. In the examples in this section, the authors select information from their sources carefully and use only what they need to make their points. It is likely that in each case the author had much more information than he used. Part of your task when working with sources is to evaluate the information you have gathered and select the material that helps you achieve your rhetorical goals. Synthesis can be a powerful tool in academic writing, but if you try to squeeze too much information from too many different sources into a passage, it is likely that your prose will be less clear and your discussion more difficult for your readers to follow.

EXERCISE 19D PRACTICING SYNTHESIZING

Write a brief paragraph in which you synthesize the following information about the job market for college graduates:

> A Bachelor's degree is one of the best weapons a job seeker can wield in the fight for employment and earnings. And staying on campus to earn a graduate degree provides safe shelter from the immediate economic storm, and will pay off with greater employability and earnings once the graduate enters the labor market. Unemployment for students with new Bachelor's degrees is an unacceptable 8.9 percent, but it's a catastrophic 22.9 percent for job seekers with a recent high school diploma—and an almost unthinkable 31.5 percent for recent high school dropouts.

Source: Carnevale, Anthony, et al. *Hard Times: College Majors, Unemployment, and Earnings.* Georgetown University Center on Education and the Work Force, 2012, cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Unemployment.Final_.update1.pdf.

> More than half of all recent graduates are unemployed or in jobs that do not require a degree, and the amount of student-loan debt carried by households has more than quintupled since 1999. These graduates were told that a diploma was all they needed to succeed, but it won't even get them out of the spare bedroom at Mom and Dad's. For many, the most tangible result of their four years is the loan payments, which now average hundreds of dollars a month on loan balances in the tens of thousands.

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Source: McArdle, Megan. "The Coming Burst of the College Bubble." *Newsweek*, 9 Sept. 2012, www.newsweek.com/megan-mcardle-coming-burst-college-bubble-64671.

> [In 2011] about 1.5 million, or 53.6 percent, of bachelor's degree-holders under the age of 25 last year were jobless or underemployed, the highest share in at least 11 years. In 2000, the share was at a low of 41 percent, before the dot-com bust erased job gains for college graduates in the telecommunications and IT fields.

Source: Yen, Hope. "Half of New Grads are Jobless or Underemployed." Associated Press, 24 Apr. 2012. *NBCNews*, www.nbcnews.com/id/47141463/ns/business-stocks_and_economy/#.Vy-CLb7Vvf1.

> Underemployment also tends to be temporary for college graduates. Even after the recession hit, Pew found that annually, about 27 percent of BA's stuck in high-school level jobs transitioned to college-level employment. . . . Unemployment for college

graduates is higher than normal. Underemployment is more prevalent, though it's less severe than college critics portray, and perhaps no worse than during the Reagan days.

Source: Weissman, Jordan. "How Bad Is the Job Market For College Grads? Your Definitive Guide." *The Atlantic*, 4 Apr. 2013, www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/04/how-bad-is-the-job-market-for-college-grads-your-definitive-guide/274580/.

Writing Summary-Response Essays

One of the most common forms of academic writing is the summary-response essay. A summary-response essay is a writer's direct engagement with another text: a scholarly article, a book, a film, a lecture, or some other kind of relevant document. In this regard, to write a summary-response essay is to participate directly in a relevant academic conversation, which is one reason why it is such a common assignment in college classes.

The specific form and content of a summary-response essay can vary depending upon the academic subject, but all summary-response writing serves the same basic purpose: to understand a text in sufficient depth so that you can respond in an informed way that contributes to an ongoing conversation about a relevant topic. For example, in an American history class, you might be studying the ongoing debates about the decision by the United States to use atomic weapons against Japan in World War II. Your instructor might assign essays by two prominent historians who have different perspectives on that decision and its moral dimensions. Writing a summary-response to one or both of those essays would enable you not only to delve more deeply into the historian's reasoning for his or her position but also to participate in this important and still-relevant debate.

Although summary-response essays are common in academic writing, they appear in various forms in popular media as well. Journalists, policymakers, business leaders, and experts in various professions will sometimes write essays in direct response to a book or editorial or magazine article as part of a conversation about important current issues or controversies. Such essays are different from reviews (see Chapter 10) in part because the purpose of a summary-response essay isn't necessarily evaluative. For example, in 2015, journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates published a book titled *Between the World and Me*, in which Coates, an African American, writes to his own teenage son about the history of racism in the United States and what it means to live as a black man in the U.S. today. The book, which won numerous awards, provoked an intense conversation about race in the U.S., and many prominent writers and political leaders wrote essays in direct response to Coates' book. Those essays, which took many different forms, might all be seen as versions of the summary-response essay. They enabled readers of Coates' book to engage in conversation about the important issues Coates raised.

As a college student, you will likely have many opportunities to write summary-response essays. Doing so is a way for you to become a more careful reader, a thoughtful participant in conversations about relevant matters, and a more effective writer.