

These sample essays were selected because they illustrated some strategies that are particularly conducive to successful synthesis writing – not just in the context of the exam, but also in the context of writing a researched argument paper – as well as some opportunities for comment on some things to watch out for when revising.

In typing them up, I have eliminated some errors (such as spelling and the occasional syntactical error), but have mostly kept the essays' wording.

Sample A

In our current age, health care systems are comprehensive and our array of knowledge is more than any other time in history. We are confident that when we fall ill, there will be a cure and fortunately, we are moving closer and closer to this becoming a reality. However, every so often we are exposed to a new threat, one that has no known cure or vaccine. Now is one of those times, as Toronto is being hit with a zombie epidemic for which there is no remedy. It is important to examine the key issues associated with the preparation for this pandemic and their implications for survival. Government instruction, responsibility to the infected, and controlling fear are important factors to prepare for because people need to listen and be realistic and smart as well as respectful without jeopardizing themselves.

Ultimately, the government needs to be in control of its citizens at all times and especially during a pandemic. People want someone to listen to and want to rely on a perceived knowledgeable figure. All levels of government should be in communication about pre-established and changing protocols. People need one source of reliable information so they should be “monitoring instruction from local government and emergency officials” (Source F).

Governments must therefore be prepared to issue orders because according to Source F, they “have the best intelligence. They know what to do and [your] safety depends on listening to their instructions.” However, they also need to be honest and not withhold information because “this kind of honesty is necessary in order to maintain the trust of society and counter the ill effects of a pandemic” (Source A). Accurate and effective information needs to be issued by the government in order to save the population and the protocols for how the information will be communicated as well as what will be communicated must be laid out ahead of time.

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Comment [1]: This synthesis task asked you to identify important issues/considerations and their implications. This clearly-stated thesis statement outlines the considerations the student believes most important (claim) and provides her reasoning, summarized in this sentence, but also outlined in this whole introductory paragraph.

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Comment [2]: Juxtaposing what you learn from different sources and showing how the ideas connect, contrast, complement one another, and so on, is the essence of synthesis. Here the student has used two sources whose ideas complement one another, the second adding complexity to the idea presented by the first, and the student's transition between the two (“However...”) pointing out that relationship.

The second issue to be prepared for is how to establish and maintain a level of responsibility to the sick. We as a society need to understand that we value life, but we need to decide at what point we no longer want to put more lives at risk to save one. Sacrifices need to be made whether they are familial or in the context of health care workers. "Society has obligations to people who are isolated or quarantined" (Source A), but each individual also has a responsibility to themselves and their family. Source E further expands on this point of our responsibility to the sick by describing different protocols based on the values of society. In some cases, the sick were exploited and used as entertainment or in the service industry. And then comes the moral obligation of deciding what qualifies as being dead (Source C). We need to plan to combat the financial troubles of the families with an infected loved one because of their inability to work and we need to make sure that everyone is treated as fairly as possible. Triage systems need to be anticipated and supplies need to be strategically rationed. We have a responsibility to treat everyone as humanely as possible in life and in death so we need to plan now so that people are respected and not exploited. Society must decide its level of responsibility and how it plans on implementing humane strategies to the sick so that as many lives as possible are saved without risking more, while respecting those who have died.

Finally, it is essential to control the amount of fear in order to focus attention on finding a solution and saving lives. Source C asserts that "global pandemics create chaos and fear" and this is true because we become overwhelmed by how much we don't know. We seem to have a "prevailing 'culture of fear'" (Source A) and when Dr Lam spoke to us, he commented on the "disproportionate amount of panic associated with pandemics." This idea of fear links back to the importance of government control because if the information is accurate, then it will limit the amount of speculation and uncertainty. Controlling fear connects to the media because the media is very prevalent in our society. We need to have reliable media coverage readily available. Source F illustrates how widespread the media is by giving the example that "every channel is reporting the outbreak of an aggressive flu." Just hearing that phrase raises one's heart rate and rapid breathing begins. Preparations for media regulation must therefore be made so that the information is

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Comment [3]: This is an example of a point that could use some more explanation – what is the context within which Source E describes this exploitation of zombies? How does that exploitation relate to the student's main point in this paragraph?

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Comment [4]: While this point is a very good one, it seems oddly placed, given the sentence before it and the one after it, and also appears to rely on information from *The Flu Pandemic and You*, and therefore should be cited. This was material added during the revision period – if this were a piece of writing that the student had worked on over time with multiple opportunities for peer feedback and revision, I would expect these lapses to be corrected.

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Comment [5]: This is an example of a citation that uses a signal phrase to attribute the source, rather than an in-text citation. This is an acceptable citation format in MLA (although, when page numbers are available, you would still indicate the page number in parentheses).

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Comment [6]: In a draft, this kind of placeholder is fine; in a revised piece, I would expect a more careful framing of the source, with some context or an indicator of whose opinion / perspective is being represented in the source material.

not overwhelming and so that it is accurate. These measures will ensure that the level of fear does not spike and that people are calm and realistic while also responsible for their own well-being. When people remain calm, they have rational thought and their energy can be directed towards finding a cure to save lives. Society must therefore prepare strategies for combatting fear.

According to Dr Lam in Source A, some believe that “disasters look like human failure in retrospect” while “others resign themselves to human disasters as unavoidable.” Through preparing government authority, planning our level of responsibility to the infected, and controlling fear, we can ensure that this pandemic will not be a human failure and that a disaster will be avoidable because people will listen and be realistic and smart as well as respectful to save themselves and their loved ones.

Sample B

Our city of Toronto is cosmopolitan, always bustling with life and it is almost impossible to imagine it any other way. But what if the most multicultural city in the world suddenly faced an enemy that no one saw coming – a deadly, virulent, and unstoppable virus that turns humans into zombies. How would you prepare? What would you do to protect the lives of you and your loved ones? Should you listen to what media headlines tell you or ignore them altogether? What happens when medical supplies run out? How do you decide when to help others or when to help yourself? These questions are the ones that should be at the forefront of your mind during preparation for a zombie apocalypse because your decisions could either propagate or halt the spread of infection across our beloved city and be the deciding factor in whether or not you and your loved ones survive.

In our modern world, technology allows the media to deliver news straight to our front door, which is extremely convenient. The problem is, as Dr Lam – one of the brave individuals who worked on the front lines during the SARS crisis – points out, “Media reports alternately frightened and reassured people” (Source A). With fear

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Comment [7]: This student has framed her claims and reasons as a series of questions that direct us toward the things she thinks are most important to consider, with suggestions of why they are important and/or their implications.

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Comment [8]: Further indication of her reasoning.

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Comment [9]: It is always helpful to contextualize authors and sources. Why should we care about what the source’s author has to say about a situation – provide some information about that person, connecting him to the subject matter in a way that establishes his authority (or, where relevant, bias).

spreading amongst the population, it becomes easy to lose your head – especially during a zombie infection. However, we must remember that the media allows us access to information we may not have readily available. Drs Lam and Lee affirm the benefits and disadvantages of the media in their pandemic survival guide when they weigh the pros and cons of the media’s influence since “[the media allows] us to rapidly share information around the globe, [making it] vital to a meaningful response to an influenza pandemic” (Source A). As this quotation suggests, the media allows society to form a stronger emergency plan because it helps us transmit ideas from places all around the globe. The more minds we have coming together, the more multi-faceted and the less vulnerable the plan becomes.

Unfortunately, Drs Lee and Lam are also quick to point out that “the remarkable volume of information regarding the threat of influenza pandemic that is available in the world news media can almost overwhelm us” (Source A). With the never-ending flood of information shooting out at consumers 24/7, how are we able to separate the truth from the over-dramatized? Do we keep our media outlets on during such an emergency so that we can stay updated? Or do we decide to shut off that stream of information to keep the panic and fear from growing? Maybe we decide to do what a fictional blogger decided to do on Emergency Info B.C. and limit our exposure to the media without cutting ourselves off completely (Source F).

Whatever the decision is, it is important to consider the implications of mass media during a pandemic. Since the effects of mass media are so far reaching due to its ability to spread so quickly, whether or not we should stay connected is most definitely a key issue to consider during preparation for a deadly zombie infectant.

While the media affects people on a global level, it is also important to consider the importance of making decisions on a regional and personal level. On a regional level, there are not always enough supplies to support entire populations of panic-stricken and disease-infected citizens. How do we decide who gets priority? In the case of a zombie apocalypse, how do we decide who deserves to die? Or as Dr Steven Schlozman, a child psychiatrist at Harvard Medical School, ponders, “How do you define what’s alive? When it is appropriate to say someone’s ‘as-good-as-dead,’ which is an awful, difficult decision?” (Source C) This situation is similar to the real-

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Comment [10]: You can refer to an idea from a source not only to support your argument, but also to concede or refute. Here the student shows a possible negative effect of media exposure – a con that should be taken into account along with the pros of staying informed and connected during a crisis.

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Comment [11]: Paraphrases and summaries are often as useful as direct quotations. They are best used when longer passages contain ideas that you want to refer to, but when exact wording isn’t the important feature of the source material. In all cases where an idea is used, whether quoted or paraphrased, you must cite the source (either in-text or using a signal phrase in the sentence).

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Comment [12]: A variety of well-chosen verbs used to introduce the selected evidence makes for not just interesting writing but also imparts the **type** of contribution made by the speaker. Is the speaker “explaining,” “outlining,” “reporting,” “demanding,” “questioning,” etc.?

life one faced by health-care workers during the SARS crisis in 2003. According to Dr Lam, there were not enough ventilators to support all the patients who required one to stay alive (Source A). Suddenly it becomes important to consider who needs it most. Do we choose the people who are closest to death or do we give the life support to the patients who have a higher chance of living before they get worse? Even if you are able to choose between the two scenarios, it becomes a question of deciding who has the “greater chance of living?” Dr Schlozman may be discussing a fictional scenario, but his point is still valid. During times of pandemic (zombie or not) who can we describe as being on the veil of death? What criteria have to be fulfilled before someone is no longer alive? Does a beating heart without a functioning brain constitute a patient? This ethical question is one of the key issues to consider during preparation because deciding to save someone instead of another will directly affect the survival rate of a population.

Finally, on a personal level the situation is similar to that of the regional level. During the spread of an infectious disease, when do we decide to help others at the risk of our own health? In George Romero’s zombie film Night of the Living Dead (1986), two characters have very different approaches. Leah A. Murray, a professor of philosophy and English, breaks down these characters when she describes Ben as “the hero of the communitarian position, working from the very start to save as many people as possible. On the other hand, Cooper embodies the individualist position of ‘every man for himself.’ He admits openly that even though he heard screaming upstairs, he refused to risk his own life by coming up to help” (Source D). At first glance, Ben is the proverbial good guy while Cooper is the “selfish prick.” It is easy to say that we would follow Ben’s footsteps as the good Samaritan if we were in that situation. Yet what if we throw in another factor into the equation, how does that change the situation? Robert Smith, a mathematician at the University of Ottawa calculated that it would only take about seven days for a city of 500,000 people to become infected by one zombie (Source C). Suddenly the whole scenario changes. Being “Ben” might not be so appealing anymore because the greater the number of people you are in contact with, the greater your chance of becoming infected. As a result, the choice between saving yourself and saving others is one

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Comment [13]: The student makes sure that when she introduces a piece of evidence from a source, she clearly and concisely explains how it relates to her argument – and, in this case, how it relates to the quotation from another source as she develops her synthesis of the two sources.

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Comment [14]: Remember that a quotation-within-a-quotation uses single quotation marks.

that we should consider carefully. Both choices have their own consequences in that saving others could put you at risk while saving yourself questions your morality. In preparing for what kind of shelter you will live under during the zombie apocalypse, this choice has great significance in how it can affect you.

A zombie apocalypse seems unfathomable to our minds today – it's the stuff scifi novels are made of, but it doesn't mean that such an occurrence is impossible. It might not be a zombie virus, but with 1 billion people living in the same world, the possibility of a pandemic outbreak is always lurking. We must carefully and meticulously weigh the pros and cons of our choices concerning the key issues of the influence of mass media, prioritizing patients during a shortage of medical supplies, and putting your health at risk to save others.