

Thesis/Antithesis/Synthesis Structure in Presentations and Papers

All presentations and papers in CISC 497 are expected to address the social, ethical and legal issues of a topic using the thesis, antithesis, synthesis framework of dialectical reasoning. Dialectical reasoning is a method of reasoning in which one starts with a thesis and develops a contradictory antithesis, both with rationales, and then combines and resolves them into a coherent synthesis, with the ultimate goal being the search for truth.

Thesis – a statement or theory that is put forward as a premise to be maintained or proved

Antithesis – the negation or contradiction of the thesis

Synthesis – the resolution of the conflict between thesis and antithesis

In CISC 497, the rationales must be backed up with facts found during research on the topic.

For the presentations, the thesis/antithesis/synthesis structure may be divided between speakers. For instance, one person could present the thesis, one the antithesis, and one the synthesis. For the papers, all three must be included in each paper and different papers must be written by each student.

How can three of you write different papers if you are doing a presentation on the same topic, with one of you presenting the thesis, one the antithesis and one the synthesis? Here is one possibility:

Person who focused on the thesis: Still focus on the thesis. Present your research for your thesis arguments. Then present only the strongest argument from the antithesis along with its rationale. Sum up with the synthesis of your choice, not necessarily what others in your team choose. Do not present research for the synthesis.

Person who focused on the antithesis: Swap the thesis and antithesis. Present your research for your antithesis arguments, making it your thesis. Then present only the strongest argument from the original thesis along with its rationale. Sum up with the synthesis of your choice, not necessarily what others in your team choose. Do not present the research for the synthesis.

Person who focused on the synthesis: Still focus on the synthesis. Present a summary of the main arguments in the thesis and antithesis, but without the research backing them up. Then present your synthesis and your research for your synthesis.

In papers for CISC 497, you must start with an intro paragraph and state your overall synthesis position as the last sentence of the intro paragraph without giving all the details.

Below is an example good structure and example synthesis. Instead one could refute the arguments in the antithesis and state that the original thesis is entirely correct or refute the arguments in the thesis and state that the original antithesis is correct.

Example from Class: Exploitation of Animals

Position Statement in Paper at End of Intro Paragraph:

“It is possible to be an ethical carnivore.”

Thesis: People should stop eating meat.

1. Meat-eating is an exploitation of animals, in which we are subjugating other beings for our own ends and causing them pain and suffering.
 - Facts from research on factory farms goes here
2. Meat-eating is unhealthy.
 - Facts from research on heart disease and cancer go here
3. Meat-eating is damaging environmentally.
 - Facts from research on environmental effects go here

Antithesis: People should continue eating meat.

1. Although we should not cause unnecessary suffering to animals, it is acceptable to use them for our own ends.
 - Argument using one or more ethical theories goes here.
2. Meat-eating is healthy.
 - Facts from research on nutrients available from meat that are unavailable or difficult to obtain without meat goes here
3. If we decide not to eat meat because it is exploiting animals, then we must not eat eggs or dairy products and must not use any other animal products or use animals for any testing, which is both impractical and not necessary ethically.
 - Facts on range of animal products we use and benefits from testing on animals

Synthesis: People should eat meat if they choose, but it should be a small part of their diet and they should purchase meat from sources that use ethical and environmentally sustainable farming practices.

1. We can avoid causing unnecessary suffering to animals both in food production and research using animal testing by choosing humane practices.
 - Facts on laws on animal testing and practices such as free-range farming
2. Meat-eating is healthy as long as it is a small part of our diet.
 - Facts from research on diet recommendations from health experts go here
3. Meat-eating would be less damaging to the environment if it is a small part of our diet and environmentally sustainable farming practices are used.
 - Facts from research on environmentally sustainable farming practices go here