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## **Multiple and Single-Source Text Integrated Writing: A Comparative Study of Task Characteristics and Composition Processes**

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### **Abstract**

Integrated tasks (IntTs) are prominent in teaching and assessing English for academic purposes. The composition process of multiple-source text IntTs is discourse synthesis. However, there is a marked lack of discussion on it in relation to single-source text IntTs as the current understanding is that it is only elicited by multiple-source text tasks. As this has been challenged by recent research, this study undertook to substantiate the claim that discourse synthesis needs to be reconceptualized. In Phase 1 of the investigation, a guided summary writing task was analyzed, piloted with 28 participants, and the scripts were independently double-coded for content reproduction and macrorule use to document the input-related processes it engaged. In Phase 2, a comparative analysis of the task characteristics and processes engaged by synthesis and guided summary writing tasks was conducted. The results indicate that (i) the two tasks are very similar and engage appreciably matching processes, and (ii) discourse synthesis can also be engaged by a single-source text integrated writing task. An innovative difference found is that it is not the number of source texts but the special-purpose task schema that elicits discourse synthesis. This and the taxonomy of integrated task types proposed in this study are of practical relevance for researchers, teachers, and assessors.

**Keywords:** discourse synthesis, guided summarization, inter and intra-textual synthesis, integrated academic reading-into-writing task types

### **Multiple and Single-Source Text Integrated Writing: A Comparative Study of Task Characteristics and Composition Processes**

In the fields of teaching (e.g., Chan et al., 2015; Leki & Carson, 1994, 1997; Plakans & Gebril, 2012) and assessing (e.g., British Council et al. 2022; Pearson, 2022; ETS, 2022; ISE, 2022) English for academic purposes (EAP), there has been a distinct shift in preference from integrated tasks to independent tasks given that the former are believed to replicate more effectively the processes engaged by actual target language use domain tasks characteristic of a variety of educational settings, specifically tertiary education. The composition process elicited by integrated tasks is discourse synthesis, the conceptualization of which has evolved through several theoretical and empirical studies (Nelson, 2008; Nelson & King, 2022; Plakans, 2009, 2010, 2013; Spivey, 1984, 1990, 1991; Spivey & King, 1989) that investigated it in relation to integrated task types, the composition processes they elicit, the assessment construct redefinition and scoring problems they pose, assessment task design issues they raise, and their pedagogical implications.

However, in spite of the fact that integrated task types have been investigated in relation to summary writing tasks (e.g., Ascención, 2008), which is a single-source text reading-into-writing task type, discourse synthesis as a process is believed to be elicited only by multiple-source text integrated task types. Recent empirical research evidence on the guided summary writing task—a single-source text reading-into-writing task type—indicates that discourse synthesis needs to be reconceptualized (Tankó, 2021b, 2022b).

Therefore, a comparative analysis of the characteristic features and processes elicited by the classical multiple-source text synthesis writing task and the single-source text reading-into-writing guided summary writing task was conducted. The aim was to investigate whether—contrary to current potentially limited perceptions—the composition process elicited by both of these integrated task types is in fact discourse synthesis. The findings substantiate the claim that discourse

synthesis is not only characteristic of multiple-source text tasks and provide valuable insights into the processes elicited by synthesis and guided summary writing tasks.

## Theoretical Background

### The Conceptualization of Discourse Synthesis

The conceptualization of discourse synthesis has evolved through several empirical studies. Spivey (1984) coined the term discourse synthesis to describe a process of composition that combines reading comprehension and written production. The tasks that elicited discourse synthesis were relabeled as *hybrid* reading-into-writing tasks (Spivey & King, 1989). Designed for teaching and assessment processes, such tasks intend to replicate as much as possible the characteristics of actual language use tasks from the educational domain so as to guarantee their authenticity (e.g., Cumming et al., 2005; Gebril, 2018; Knoch & Sitajalabhorn, 2013; Plakans, 2013). According to Bachman and Palmer (2010), to achieve authenticity, teaching and assessment task designers must ensure that discourse synthesis tasks engage language learners' and test takers' language ability in the same way as actual target language use tasks do. This is necessary because (1) making meaningful interpretations about the language learners' or test takers' language ability based on their performance elicited with the task and (2) the generalizability of these interpretations to the target language use domain—that is beyond instructional or assessment settings—depend on the extent to which the characteristics of language teaching or assessment tasks correspond to those of target language use tasks. For this reason, discourse synthesis tasks consist of two or more input texts—sometimes delivered through different channels (i.e., aural and visual)—on various aspects of the same or topic (e.g., Knoch & Sitajalabhorn, 2013; Plakans & Gebril, 2013, 2017; Spivey, 1984, Spivey & King, 1989). For example, in Spivey's 1984 study, which investigated how university students with differing comprehension

skills performed on a reading-into-writing synthesis task, the participants were given descriptive texts on the same topic, namely three encyclopedia articles presenting facts about the armadillo. They were instructed to write an expository composition, specifically a report with the rhetorical goal of informing young adults through the integration of factual content from the source texts provided. In terms of propositional characteristics, each source text (i.e., ST1, ST2, and ST3) contained some unique propositions; some propositions were also present in one additional source text (e.g., proposition X was shared by ST1 and ST3, whereas proposition Y was shared by ST1 and ST2); and some occurred in all three source texts. The task visibly intended to replicate an academic writing scenario where writers have to read several source texts on a given topic and produce a source-based piece of writing that presents a synthesis of relevant and related content (e.g., a discursive essay or a review of the literature).

This replication endeavor is also captured by the more recent definitions of integrated writing tasks, that is “test tasks that combine two or more language skills to simulate authentic language-use situations” (Plakans, 2013, p. 1). Knoch and Sitajalabhorn (2013) further defined integrated writing tasks as having these two key features: “(a) the input material needs to include a significant proportion of language and, directly following from this, (b) the task needs to require that the language in the source material is used and transformed to complete the writing task” (p. 304). Both of these characterize source-based writing that students do in university content courses.

Due to the parallel deployment of reading and writing abilities in such tasks, Spivey (1990) described discourse synthesis as a hybrid act of literacy in which the cognitive operations performed during the reading and writing task completion phases, that is engaging in “textual transformations through composing” (p. 265), are mutually affective and cannot be separated easily—or maybe not at all. The process underlying both reading and writing was argued to be meaning making for the purposes of comprehension and composition (Nelson, 2008). Therefore, those engaged in discourse synthesis and henceforth referred to as

discourse synthesis writers are believed to construct meaning—that is mental text representations—during both the reading and writing phases (Spivey, 1991), which is in agreement with mainstream research on reading (Kintsch, 1998, 2009, 2012, 2018) and writing (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Hayes, 2012).

Language users engaged in the act of discourse synthesis actively construct a new piece of discourse. The condition for this is that the integrated task must authorize generative processes by making possible the creation of a novel configuration of meaning and by enhancing the “writer’s own sense of authority in writing the piece” (Spivey, 1990, p. 281). Several attempts have been made at creating taxonomies of integrated tasks in which one of the organizing principles was the extent to which generative processes are required for task completion. Two such notable attempts are that of Plakans (2013) and of Gebril (2018)—however, as shown below, neither of these is adequate.

The classification proposed by Gebril (2018) fails to differentiate systematically between task types, the modalities of the input (e.g., non-verbal visual information, verbal visual information, or a mix), and language abilities or skills required for the completion of the tasks. It therefore contains confusing overlapping categories that render it unsuitable for analytic purposes. More acceptable—but affected by the narrow assessment perspective of the study in which it was proposed—is the taxonomy of integrated task types put forward by Plakans (2013). This taxonomy is a substantial adaptation of the academic writing task taxonomy compiled by Leki and Carson (1997). As a result, two of the categories, text- or content-responsible and stimulus-related tasks, are aptly differentiated based on the number of generative processes the tasks require. However, the third task added by Plakans (2013) does not match the organizing principle used in the case of the first two categories. It features thematically linked integrated writing tasks, and therefore it represents a type of writing task in a test paper whose topic is identical with that of the task(s) in the reading paper preceding the writing paper. In the case of such tasks, the relationship between the tasks cannot only be

stimulus-related or content-responsible, as Plakans (2013) stated, but the reading input may be intended (also) to serve as language input for the writing task. A comprehensive and multi-faceted classification taxonomy that is better suited for the purposes of this study is the one proposed in Figure 1. It differentiates between integrated tasks based on the degree to which generative processes are required for task completion, as well the language skills and the semiotic modes involved.

The analytic description of the process of discourse construction differentiated the cognitive operations of *organization*, *selection*, and *connection*. Discourse synthesis requires writers to select ideas from several input texts, reorganize them, and establish new connections between them through integration across input texts and the use of their background knowledge (Nelson, 2008; Spivey, 1984, 1990). The ideas selected for discourse synthesis were found to vary in terms of levels of importance, that is, according to their hierarchical position in the text base, namely the “sequence of propositions expressed by the whole sentence sequence of a text” (van Dijk, 1980, p. 32)—meaning that the higher position a proposition occupies in the text base, the more likely it is to be relevant for the task—and according to their prominence indicated by the recurrence of the same proposition across several texts (Spivey, 1984).

### **Cognitive Transformational Operations in Discourse Synthesis**

As several studies have discussed in detail (Nelson, 2008; Nelson & King, 2022; Spivey, 1984, 1990; Spivey & King, 1989), there is an interaction between the mental representations derived by means of construction from input texts and those constructed for output texts during the organizing, selecting, and connecting operations. In this section, the brief descriptions of the operations based on these studies are elaborated with additional relevant theoretical and empirical research findings. While performing the *organization operation* in the reading phase, discourse synthesis writers carry out organizational transformations and as a result change the representation of the text meaning as it was intended by the

Figure 1

*A New Taxonomy of Source-Based Writing Tasks*


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I.	Basis of categorization:	<i>Source use</i>
	Principle of categorization:	<i>Degree of reliance on input content</i>

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Task types:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ stimulus-related writing (i.e., in order to complete a task, writers must read the input and use it as a source of inspiration for the topic of their composition, but the input content does not have to be reproduced either partially or fully in their written product—it only serves as a “springboard” for writing, see Leki &amp; Carson, 1997, p. 41); Microskills*: —</li> <li>▪ text or content-responsible writing (i.e., in order to complete a task, writers must both read and provide evidence that they have understood the input; they must base their written product “on content acquired primarily from text”, see Leki &amp; Carson, 1997, p. 41); Microskills*: 1, 2, 3.1, 3.2</li> </ul>
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II.	Basis of categorization:	<i>Language skills</i>
	Principle of categorization:	<i>Types of macro and micro language skills engaged by the task</i>

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Task types:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ reading-into-writing</li> <li>▪ listening-into-writing</li> <li>▪ reading and listening-into-writing</li> </ul>
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III.	Basis of categorization:	<i>Form of the input</i>
	Principle of categorization:	<i>Semiotic modes</i>

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Task types:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ non-verbal visual input (e.g., picture description)</li> <li>▪ verbal visual input (e.g., global summary or guided summary, see Tankó, 2022a)</li> <li>▪ non-verbal and verbal visual input (e.g., graph description task)</li> </ul>
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\*Microskills: 1. Note-taking; 2. Direct quotation; 3. Indirect quotation: 3.1 Summarization, 3.2 Paraphrasing

author. This was addressed also by Widdowson (1984), who considered the reading process to be an instance of reader interaction with the text controlled by the reading goal. According to him, depending on their reading goals, readers can adopt a specific stance towards the text, namely a reader is “free to take up whatever position suits his purpose on the dominance/dependence scale” (p. 91). Consequently, readers can be positioned along a cline with submissive and assertive positions at the two extremes. Submissive readers decode the message as intended by the writer, maintaining the hierarchical structure of the text base. These readers engage especially in global careful reading (Urquhart & Weir, 1998). Assertive readers, however, have their own well-defined reading aims and process a text with respect to these aims, so they can disregard the hierarchical structure of the text base: a low-ranked microproposition from the text author’s point of view may become a seminal proposition for assertive readers due to their individual reading goals. This has been confirmed by Newton et al. (2018) as well as by Robinson (1987), who stated that:

(a)n assertive reader brings his own purpose to the reading context and seeks to dominate the writer by interpreting with reference to the terms and conditions of this purpose. The dominant reader reconstructs only that aspect of the writer’s overall intention which satisfies his purpose. (p. 91).

Tankó (2021b, 2022b) found that even those readers who assumed the dominant reader stance first carefully read the entire source text provided in a guided summary writing task: An informed dominant reader stance therefore depends on the careful global comprehension of the source text, which requires the reader to assume a submissive reader stance first.

Reading goals that require discourse synthesis writers to assume an assertive reader stance are set not by tasks that activate conventional genre schemas generating well-defined and predictable mental representations (e.g., taking the form of a Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? for a



newspaper article recounting an event, see Bell, 1998; or the IMRD superstructure for a research article, see Swales, 1990), but by tasks that activate “special-purpose schema[s]” (Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978, p. 373) which override canonical superstructures and generate unique mental representations. As a consequence, much the same as readers of inexpertly written input texts do (Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978), discourse synthesis writers engage in organizational transformations that result in task-specific, highly individual representations of the input texts according to their purposes (Lorch & van den Broek, 1997; Nelson, 2008).

While performing the organization operation in the writing phase, discourse synthesis writers are guided by their mental representation of the text they intend to write and generate new relations between the ideas derived from the source texts. As Spivey (1990) noted, the content organization required for discourse synthesis is determined by both the reading and writing processes—production is therefore determined by reception, as also confirmed by Tankó (2021b, 2022b).

In the course of the *selection operations* performed during the reading phase, the decisions of discourse synthesis writers can be guided by patterns of textual organization (e.g., the problem-solution pattern; see Hoey, 2001) as corroborated by empirical research evidence (Johns, 1988), and by the position held by propositions in the text base. However, both during reading and writing, the selection decisions of discourse synthesis writers are informed by one or more principles of relevance—referred to by van Dijk (1979) as differential relevance, “because it differentially selects items for ‘special treatment’ from among similar items (i.e., items on the same level)” (p. 118)—determined primarily not by textual organization and hierarchy considerations but by the structure of the emerging text (Spivey, 1984, 1990) controlled by the reading goal (i.e., the task schema) set by the task instruction (Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978; Tankó 2021b). Spivey (1990) noted that the formulation of such discourse goals that guide the textual transformation processes in discourse synthesis depends on writers’ task management ability.

The *connection operations* performed during the reading phase allow discourse synthesis writers to integrate the content extracted from the source text with their own prior knowledge, a construct subsuming world, topic, and discourse knowledge such as perceptiveness of text structure (Spivey, 1990; Spivey & King, 1989), in order to form what is known as a situation model of text representation (see Kintsch, 2004; Perrig & Kintsch, 1985; Singer & Leon, 2007; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). Perceptiveness of text structure and task management ability were found to improve with cognitive development (Nelson, 2008) and writing skills training (Nelson, 2008; Plakans, 2010; Szűcs, 2020).

Discourse synthesis writers generate content in a number of ways: by inventing new content which is new “in terms of the way content was shaped and positioned” (Spivey, 1990, p. 280), by connecting ideas derived from the source texts in a novel way, and by inferring new compressed content. When they integrate source-text content with their own prior knowledge, the connections they create allow them to infer macropropositions with the use of the zero, deletion, generalization, or construction macrorules (see van Dijk, 1980).

### **Purpose of the Present Study**

Based on the analysis of the characteristics of integrated reading-into-writing tasks and the nature of the composing processes they elicit, the present study aimed to investigate whether the guided summary writing task is in fact a type of discourse synthesis task that—contrary to current, potentially limited perceptions of discourse synthesis—integrates content not from multiple source texts but from a single source text. In order to achieve this aim, the research questions formulated for this study were as follows:

1. To what extent does the single-source text integrated guided summary writing task share the characteristic features of a multiple-source text integrated synthesis writing task?

2. To what extent is discourse synthesis, the process of composition required for the completion of a multiple-source text integrated synthesis writing task, also engaged by the single-source text integrated guided summary writing task?

### Method

The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, a guided summary writing task developed for teaching/learning purposes but reproducing the key features of live guided summary writing assessment tasks—except for source text length and time constraints—was designed and piloted. The aim of the pilot was to ascertain whether the guiding statement incorporated in the task instruction activated the principles of relevance for the selection decisions which the task actually intended to activate. Consequently, the guided summary writing task was administered to a group of students whose language proficiency, background knowledge profile, and language use domain characteristics matched that of the target group and had completed an academic skills course in which they practiced academic reading, summarizing, paraphrasing, and writing. The summary scripts were analyzed by two independent coders for content point inclusion and, as a corollary, given that each content point was connected to the application of one or more macrorules, for macrorule use.

In the second phase, a comparative analysis was conducted. The characteristics of classic discourse synthesis tasks (i.e., those originally designed by Spivey, 1984, 1991; Spivey & King 1989) and guided summary writing tasks (Tankó, 2019, 2022a), as well as the processes activated by the two tasks were compared systematically. For this purpose, an analytical framework was designed based on (i) the task features and the composition processes required for the completion of the discourse synthesis and guided summary writing tasks reported in the body of theoretical and empirical works published on reading-into-writing task

types, and (ii) the framework of language task characteristics (Bachman & Palmer, 2010)—elaborated with (iii) the comprehensive and multi-faceted source-based writing task taxonomy proposed in this study (see Figure 1). The subsequent sections provide more details about these two phases.

## Phase One

### Instrument

In this section, first the guided summary writing task type is described generically. Then the actual guided summary writing task type which was designed, piloted, and used in this study is presented.

#### *Characteristic Features of the Guided Summary Writing Assessment Task Type*

The integrated reading-into-writing task investigated in this study is a reader-based (Hidi & Anderson, 1986) guided summarization task. Tankó (2022a) explained the difference between a complete or global source text and a selective or guided source text summary the following way:

Writers may have to read complete texts (e.g., an article or a book) or parts of a larger text (e.g., a chapter) and summarize all the main ideas from them. In such cases, writers produce complete source text summaries. However, there are cases when writers are instructed or would like to extract only specific ideas from complete texts or parts of a larger text. In such cases, they write guided summaries. The difference, therefore, between a complete source text summary and a guided summary is that whereas for the first type all the main ideas of a text need to be extracted, for the second only specific ideas have to be extracted and written up in the form of a summary.

Both types of summary writing processes are question driven. When writing a complete source text summary, the writer asks the

questions: *What are the main ideas in this text?* and *What are the supporting details of the main ideas?* [...] Writers who write a guided summary use the following questions: *What are those (main) ideas in this text that are related to topic X / to aspect N of topic X?* and *What are the supporting details of the (main) ideas related to topic X / to aspect N of topic X?* (p. 119)

The task was designed to reflect changes in the field of academic English skills development in tertiary education, where integrated tasks have been reported to occur as course assignments with increasing frequency (Chan et al., 2015; Leki & Carson, 1994, 1997; Plakans & Gebril, 2012, 2017). This is most likely due to the knowledge-transforming feature (Bereiter et al. 1988) of the language use activities characteristic of the domain. Furthermore, the task also aimed to reflect the universal changeover to integrated language assessment tasks that has taken place in EAP assessment in all the major international academic English tests (e.g., IELTS Academic, British Council et al., 2022; Pearson Test of English Academic, Pearson, 2022; TOEFL iBT and the revised Paper-delivered Test, ETS, 2022; or Trinity College London's Integrated Skills in English test, ISE, 2022).

According to the test specification for stakeholders (Tankó, 2021a), the guided summary writing task intends to engage test takers' English academic reading, note-taking, summarizing, paraphrasing, argumentation, and writing skills in order to make possible the measurement of the students' ability to use English at a high level of proficiency in formal academic language use settings. Test takers have 60 minutes to complete the task without the use of dictionaries or any other reference materials or electronic devices.

The source text is an approximately 700-word-long reading passage on a general academic topic (e.g., using dictation in the language classroom) that discusses several aspects of the topic in varying details, in various parts of the reading passage, and with occasional repetitions. Test takers must find and summarize five or six thematically related aspects by

responding to a guiding question prompted by the instruction. They do not summarize the whole text (i.e., do not write a global summary) but only those parts that contain propositions that answer the guiding question (i.e., write a guided summary). The summary must be written up in the form of a complete paragraph of about 130 words in a neutral, semi-formal, or formal style typical of popular science magazines.

The process of task completion engages academic reading and writing in addition to a range of related academic skills, such as note-taking, summarizing, paraphrasing, or the use of academic register. It therefore integrates the tasks of reading an academic text globally and selectively, extracting and summarizing specific propositional content, rewording the summarized content, and writing it up in the form of a short academic text. The available empirical research evidence demonstrates that the guided summary writing task does in fact engage the above-mentioned language skills (Szűcs, 2020; Tankó, 2021b, 2022b).

### *The Guided Summary Writing Task Used in this Study*

The guided summary writing task designed and piloted for this study was developed according to the Academic Skills Test specification for item writers (Tankó, 2011). The reading passage (see Appendix A) is a self-contained excerpt selected from E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the novel* (1956). The entire input text is 1,224 words long and contains several distinct sections distributed across the text with propositional content relevant for the task, which altogether comprise 440 words. Five content points were identified in the reading passage during task design with the guiding question: *Why are flat characters of use to the novelist?* The first of these content points represents a description. The text type of the remaining four is argumentation, and for the purposes of a finer grained analysis these were split up into the components of claim and supporting evidence. The content points intended to be elicited with the guiding question that operationalized the principles of relevance controlling the selection decisions for this task and the macrorules (MRs; van Dijk, 1980) to be

applied to the extracted propositional content are presented in Appendix B.

### *Administration of the Guided Summary Writing Task*

The guided summary writing task designed for this study was piloted with 28 English majors who had completed the academic skills course. The task was administered in class, and the use of a dictionary or any other reference materials was not allowed. The students were given 90 minutes to work, but all of them handed in their summaries in less than 70 minutes.

### *Data Obtained from the Piloting of the Guided Summary Writing Task*

The students' summaries were transcribed and then coded independently by two trained analysts in order to identify the content points included. The agreement between the two coders was calculated as a percentage value and was high (91%). In the case of each disagreement, the mismatching coding decisions were discussed, and a consensus code was recorded before the analysis of the data.

## **Phase Two**

For the second phase of the study, an analytical framework consisting of two subsections was constructed (see Appendix C). In the first, the points of comparison were the discourse synthesis and guided summary writing task characteristics. In the second subsection, the comparison was guided by the characteristics of the composing processes elicited by the multiple and single-source text task types investigated. The results of the analyses conducted in Phases one and two of this study and their discussion are presented in the following section.

## **Results and Discussion**

In this section, first the results of the piloting of the guided summary writing task are discussed, and then—with the help of the worked task

included in Appendix A—the characteristics of the two task types investigated and the composing processes they elicit are compared.

### Guided Summary Writing Task Pilot

As shown in Table 1, although the number of content points (CPs) included varied to a large degree—whereas CP3A was included by all the students, CP4A only occurred in five summaries—overall the students identified and included each content point intended to be selectively extracted from the source text based on the guiding question. The close number of occurrences of the content points subdivided into the claim (“A”) and supporting evidence (“B”) components (see Appendix A) most likely indicates that the students recognized the claim–support organizational pattern of the task-relevant propositional content in the input and reproduced it in their summaries accordingly.

**Table 1**

*Content Points Included in the Guided Summaries and the Macrorules Used*

	GUS	Macrorule*	%
CP1	11	SEL	39
CP2A	25	SEL	89
CP2B	28	GEN	100
CP3A	25	SEL	89
CP3B	23	GEN	82
CP4A	5	SEL	18
CP4B	6	SEL	21
CP5A	12	SEL	43
CP5B	11	SEL	39

\*SEL = selection, GEN = generalization

Based on the macrorules associated with the content points, without an analysis of the actual macrorule use quality, it can be conjectured that



summary writers used the selection and generalization rules. A discussion of the level of skill required for the competent application of the macrorules is not necessary for this analysis. What is important for the comparison of the composition processes elicited by the guided summary writing and discourse synthesis tasks is that during the completion of the guided summary writing task, students engaged not only in content selection and restructuring but also compressing.

As van Dijk (1980) pointed out, the deletion rule can be considered to be a selection rule: "In a more positive sense, then, the same rule may be taken as a SELECTION rule, which selects from a text base all propositions which are interpretation conditions (presuppositions) of other propositions in the text base" (p. 47). As the students selected specific propositional content for the summary, they also deleted irrelevant propositional content. Moreover, they also used their prior knowledge to compress meaning and in this way constructed macropropositions and generalizations—in this case from details. To do this, they had to recognize that certain propositions are semantically connected and that through inference a superordinate proposition could be abstracted. Specifically, students had to delete three of the four instances of CP1 ( $f=4$ ) (see Appendix A) and generate one content point from CP2A ( $f=4$ ) and CP2B ( $f=4$ ). Therefore, based on the above discussion of content points and macrorules, it can be concluded that each content point was identified by the summary writers in the source text and included in the summaries with the use of the selection and generalization macrorules.

### Task Type Characteristics

A comparison of the characteristic features of discourse synthesis and guided summary writing task types indicates that the two are very similar despite the conspicuous difference in the number of source texts.

Both task types are integrated given that, unlike independent writing tasks, they combine reading comprehension and written

production (Cumming et al., 2005). The lengthy verbal input material in both tasks must be comprehended and transformed in order to complete the tasks (Spivey, 1984, 1991; Tankó, 2019). Both types have been used as teaching and assessment tasks (e.g., British Council et al., 2022; ETS, 2022; Pearson, 2022; Tankó 2019, 2022a), and both elicit an extended production response (Spivey, 1984, 1991; Tankó, 2019, 2021b). Writers are expected to generate well-organized, self-contained, stand-alone, and complete pieces of discourse that are structurally not isomorphic with the source text and have distinct functions in new contexts (Nelson & King, 2022; Tankó, 2019). In order to complete either task type, writers must rely substantially on the input content, so content-responsible writing is required by both (Spivey, 1990; Tankó, 2019, 2022a). A further similarity is that two language skills are needed for the completion of each task: reading and writing. The tasks also share the same semiotic mode regarding input: writers have to process verbal visual input in both cases. One key difference between the tasks, however, is the number of source texts provided as input, which ranged from two (Spivey, 1991) to three (Spivey, 1984; Spivey & King, 1989) in the case of discourse synthesis tasks, whereas there is only one source text in the guided summary writing task.

Both task types are designed to simulate and replicate as much as possible the characteristics of real life language use tasks typically occurring in the educational domain (Plakans, 2013; Stemmer, 2019; Tankó, 2020). Furthermore, both require prior experience with the task types and an understanding of the functions they fulfil in the educational domain (Nelson & King, 2022; Tankó, 2019). In terms of the topical characteristics of the input, the two task types are also rather similar in that the source texts in discourse synthesis tasks either all focus on exactly the same topic (Spivey, 1984; Spivey & King, 1989) or on closely related topics; for example, each of the two texts deals with a mollusc subspecies (Spivey, 1991). The input text in a guided summary writing task also provides closely related propositional content, or thematic aspects, on one specific topic but within one source text. However, irrespective of whether the propositional content relevant to the task is provided in one or more

source texts, its features and potential patterns of occurrence within and across texts are identical in both tasks. Each source text in the case of a discourse synthesis task (Spivey, 1990; Spivey & King, 1989) and each text segment including a content point in the case of a guided summary writing task can feature unique propositional content (e.g., CP3A or CP3B in the sample summary, see Appendix A). Moreover, just as the same propositional content can occur repeatedly in more than one source text in a discourse synthesis task (see Spivey, 1990; Spivey & King, 1989), as the analysis of the sample guided summary writing task revealed, the same content point can also recur in the source text (e.g., whereas CP2A occurs in two, both CP1 and CP2B occur in four text segments, see Appendix A). As discussed in the next section, the skilful manipulation of the propositional content requires the use of almost identical processes in the case of both task types.

### **Task Completion Process Features**

The majority of the processes required for the completion of discourse synthesis are also present in guided summary writing task types. The fact that the two task types require that these processes be applied across different numbers of source texts is a formal one.

The interpretation of the discourse synthesis and guided summary writing task schemas is reported to be a notably more complex process than in the case of independent writing tasks or conventional genre schemata. Writers of both integrated task types re-read the instructions several times in order to understand what the task was (Plakans, 2010; Tankó, 2022b), how they were supposed to complete it (e.g., avoid plagiarism or monitor the process of synthesis, see Plakans, 2010; Tankó, 2019, 2022b), and what their written product was supposed to be like in terms of rhetorical function and genre (e.g., an informative report versus a stand-alone argumentative guided summary). Furthermore, in the case of the guided summary writing task, students had to formulate a guiding question on the basis of the instruction (Tankó, 2021b). For these reasons,

the creation of a task representation and the interpretation of task demands are equally complex and taxing processes in the case of both task types.

As both Plakans (2010) and Szűcs (2020) demonstrated, inexperienced and experienced writers approached each task type in markedly different ways and used different composition processes, which resulted in substantially different written products. Therefore, prior experience with these task types, including explicit instruction, is necessary so that writers develop the appropriate task management abilities. They must understand, for example, what amount of input is required and how that input needs to be processed for the expected response. The scope of the relationship in the case of both tasks is both broad and narrow. Writers must first read the input text(s) entirely and subsequently narrow the range of input to be processed for their written products to the task relevant propositional content only. This is done by consecutively assuming the submissive and authoritative assertive reader position. Tankó (2021b) found that some summary writers managed to deploy careful global and selective reading processes simultaneously.

Furthermore, writers also need to be aware that they are engaged in meaning construction both during reading and writing. During reading, they first construct a global representation of the source text(s). Following this, while composing the written product, they select the relevant propositional content and restructure it according to the requirements of the expected written product. The fact that writers construct mental text representations, often by integrating source text content with their prior knowledge resulting in “novel configuration of meaning” (Spivey, 1990, p. 281) during both the reading and writing phases in the case of both tasks has been documented in several studies (Plakans, 2009; Plakans et al., 2018; Szűcs, 2020; Tankó, 2021b). Also well documented is the difficulty to separate the reading and composing phases of task completion (Spivey, 1990; Tankó, 2021b, 2022b). The two mental representation generating processes overlap and affect one another as writers engage in recursive composition processes in the case of both task types.

The cognitive operations of organization, selection, and connection have been thoroughly described in the body of literature available on discourse synthesis, and ample empirical evidence is available on how they are employed in the course of the completion of integrated tasks (Cumming et al., 2005; Plakans, 2009; Spivey, 1984, 1990, 1991; Spivey & King, 1989). When engaged in organization, both discourse synthesis (e.g., Plakans, 2009; Spivey, 1990) and guided summary writers (Tankó, 2021b, 2022b) structure the content of the input texts they read, and their reading processes are influenced by the composing processes, namely the structure of the emerging product they are writing. Their selection processes are also determined by the task schema that sets a selective reading goal in the case of both task types. Writers assume an assertive reader position and select propositional content relevant for their expected products, and in so doing change the representation of the text meaning as it was intended by the author of each source text (Spivey, 1990; Tankó, 2021b, 2022b).

However, the relevance principles used in the case of the two task types are somewhat different. Whereas discourse synthesis writers select propositional content on the basis of propositional prominence determined by the recurrence and by the position that a proposition occupies in the text base, guided summary writers select propositional content based on differential relevance (van Dijk, 1979) as determined by the task instruction (Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978). Depending on the macrostructure of the source text, the writers of either task type may have to select one instance of recurring propositional content (e.g., in the case of CP1, which is repeated 4 times in the guided summary source text, see Appendix A). However, whereas prominence can be a shared relevance principle, in the case of the guided summary a microproposition—that is a low-ranking proposition in the text base—may be actually included in the summary without any changes, or it may have to be transformed with the generation or construction rules in order to formulate a macroproposition.

When they perform connection operations, both discourse synthesis and guided summary writers construct mental representations by means of inference and elaboration based on the input they read by linking propositional content in the source text with their prior knowledge. They also use their prior knowledge to identify and link propositional content relevant for the task across multiple texts or within a single text, as well as to invent and write up content that is novel in terms of degree of conciseness, rhetorical structure, and language use (Spivey, 1990; Tankó 2021b). In discourse synthesis, writing an informative report requires streamlining the content extracted from the source texts and framing it with an introduction and a conclusion typical of the report genre. Guided summary writers have to invent a topic and a concluding sentence, two summative new macropropositions that are inferred from the meaning and functions of the summarized and paraphrased content points included in the body of the summary (Tankó, 2019).

Finally, the use of macrorules for content processing occurs in the case of both discourse synthesis and guided summary writing (Spivey, 1990; Tankó, 2019, 2021b). Discourse synthesis and guided summary writers both use the deletion/selection macrorule when they identify repeated propositions relevant to the task, as they only include these propositions once in their written products. The same rule is used not only to eliminate redundancy but also to delete irrelevant propositions at all text base levels and unnecessary propositions for other macroprocesses (e.g., construction). When discourse synthesis writers combine source text content with their prior knowledge and infer content for their written products, they engage in the same processes that allow guided summary writers to infer macropropositions with the use of the generalization or construction macrorules.

The results of the comparison of the task features and of the task completion processes characteristic of the two task types indicate that they are markedly similar both in terms of task characteristics and completion processes. Both tasks require students to engage in discourse synthesis in order to complete them. The findings suggest that two types of synthesis,

namely inter- and intra-textual synthesis, should be distinguished. The outcome of the two phases of comparison are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Summary of the Comparison of Task Type Characteristics and Task Completion Processes*

Criterion	Identical for the discourse synthesis & guided summary writing task types*
<i>Task Type Characteristics</i>	
Task type	✓
Purpose	✓
Type of response	✓
Directness of relationship	✓
Language skills	✓
Input form	✓
Number of source texts	✗
Authenticity	✓
Familiarity with academic reading and writing	✓
Topical characteristics of the input	~✓
Propositional content	✓
<i>Task Completion Processes</i>	
Task representation	✓
Task management ability	✓
Scope of relationship	✓
Meaning construction	✓
Task completion phases	✓
Cognitive operation 1: Organization	✓
Cognitive operation 2: Selection	~✓
Cognitive operation 3: Connection	✓
Macrorule use	✓

\* ✓ - matching, ~✓ - similar, ✗ - mismatching task type characteristics or task completion process features

## Conclusion

Given the unquestionably increasing importance and frequency of occurrence of integrated tasks in English for EAP instruction and assessment due to the authentic way these tasks are considered to replicate the characteristic features of target language use domain tasks as well as the processes engaged by them, this study undertook to investigate a multiple and single-source text integrated reading-into-writing task type. The aim was to compare the task characteristics and composing processes required for the completion of synthesis and guided summary writing tasks in order to determine whether the process underlying both is discourse synthesis, which earlier had been claimed to only occur in the case of multiple-source text tasks.

The analysis conducted partly on the basis of the novel, comprehensive, and multi-faceted taxonomy of integrated task types proposed in this study revealed that except for one key formal difference, the number of source texts given as input, some topical characteristics of the input, and the type of relevance principles activated by the cognitive operation of selection, the two task types are very similar and the processes required for their completion overlap to a large extent. Consequently, it can be stated that contrary to currently held limited perceptions, discourse synthesis as a composition process can also be engaged by a single-source text reading-into-writing task: we can distinguish here between *inter-textual* and *intra-textual* synthesis. What elicits discourse synthesis is not the number of source texts provided as input but the special-purpose schema set for the task and operationalized with the selective reading goal. This is a seminal difference thus far overlooked in the body of literature on discourse synthesis and integrated tasks. This finding should be of practical relevance for researchers, teachers, and assessors using integrated tasks to analyze, teach and test discourse synthesis. Researchers can conduct analyses informed by a more accurate conceptual definition of discourse synthesis, and EAP instructors can explain more clearly and effectively the composition processes



underlying single and multiple-source text writing tasks when they teach source-based academic writing. Finally, assessors can formulate better construct definitions and measure discourse synthesis more accurately with integrated writing tasks.

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**Appendix A**  
**The Worked Guided Summary Writing Task**  
**Used in the Study**  
**(Tankó, 2022, pp. 115–117)**

Write a paragraph of 140 words (+/-10%) in which you summarize in your own words as far as possible *the reasons why flat characters are of use to the novelist*, which are discussed in the reading passage below.

**The actors in a story\***

We may divide characters into flat and round. Flat characters were called "humorous" in the seventeenth century, and are sometimes called types, and sometimes caricatures. In their purest form, they are constructed round a single idea or quality: when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round. [The really flat character can be expressed in one sentence ~~such as "I never will desert Mr. Micawber."~~] **CP1** There is Mrs. Micawber—she says she won't desert Mr. Micawber, she doesn't, and there she is. Or: "I must conceal, even by subterfuges, the poverty of my master's house." There is Caleb Balderstone in *The Bride of Lammermoor*. He does not use the actual phrase, but it completely describes him; he has no existence outside it, no pleasures, none of the private lusts and aches that must complicate the most consistent of servitors. Whatever he does, wherever he goes, whatever lies he tells or plates he breaks, it is to conceal the poverty of his master's house. It is not his *idée fixe*, because there is nothing in him into which the idea can be fixed. He is the idea, and such life as he possesses radiates from its edges and from the scintillations it strikes when other elements in the novel impinge. Or take Proust. There are numerous flat characters in Proust, such as the Princess of Parma, or Legrandin. [Each can be expressed in a single sentence, ~~the Princess's sentence being, "I must be particularly careful to be kind."~~] **CP1** She does nothing except to be particularly careful, and those of the other characters who are more

complex than herself easily see through the kindness, since it is only a by-product of the carefulness.

{[One great advantage of flat characters is that they are easily recognized whenever they come in – recognized by the reader’s emotional eye, ~~not by the visual eye, which merely notes the recurrence of a proper name. In Russian novels, where they so seldom occur, they would be a decided help.~~ It is a convenience for an author when he can strike with his full force at once, and flat characters are very useful to him,] **CP2A-CLAIM** + [since they never need reintroducing, never run away, have not to be watched for development, and provide their own atmosphere – ~~little luminous disks of a pre-arranged size, pushed hither and thither like counters across the void or between the stars; most satisfactory.~~] **CP2B-SUPPORT**

{[A second advantage is that they are easily remembered by the reader afterwards.] **CP3A-CLAIM** + [They remain in his mind as unalterable for the reason that they were not changed by circumstances; they moved through circumstances, which gives them in retrospect a comforting quality, and preserves them when the book that produced them may decay.] **CP3B-SUPPORT** The Countess in *Evan Harrington* furnishes a good little example here. Let us compare our memories of her with our memories of Becky Sharp. We do not remember what the Countess did or what she passed through. What is clear is her figure and the formula that surrounds it, namely, “Proud as we are of dear papa, we must conceal his memory.” All her rich humour proceeds from this. She is a flat character. Becky is round. [She, too, is on the make, but she cannot be summed up in a single phrase, ~~and we remember her in connection with the great scenes through which she passed and as modified by those scenes – that is to say, we do not remember her so easily because she waxes and wanes and has facets like a human being.~~] **CP1** {[All of us, even the sophisticated, yearn for permanence, and to the unsophisticated permanence is the chief excuse for a work of art. ~~We all want books to endure, to be refuges, and their inhabitants to be always the same.~~



**CP4B-SUPPORT** + [and flat characters tend to justify themselves on this account.]} **CP4A-CLAIM**

All the same, critics who have their eyes fixed severely upon daily life—as were our eyes last week— have very little patience with such renderings of human nature. Queen Victoria, they argue, cannot be summed up in a single sentence, so what excuse remains for Mrs. Micawber? One of our foremost writers, Mr. Norman Douglas, is a critic of this type, and the passage from him which I will quote puts the case against flat characters in a forcible fashion. The passage occurs in an open letter to D. H. Lawrence, with whom he is quarrelling: a doughty pair of combatants, the hardness of whose hitting makes the rest of us feel like a lot of ladies up in a pavilion. He complains that Lawrence, in a biography, has falsified the picture by employing “the novelist’s touch,” and he goes on to define what this is:

It consists, I should say, in a failure to realize the complexities of the ordinary human mind; it selects for literary purposes two or three facets of a man or woman, generally the most spectacular, and therefore useful ingredients of their character and disregards all the others. Whatever fails to fit in with these specially chosen traits is eliminated—must be eliminated, for otherwise the description would not hold water. Such and such are the data: everything incompatible with those data has to go by the board. It follows that the novelist’s touch argues, often logically, from a wrong premise: it takes what it likes and leaves the rest. The facets may be correct as far as they go but there are too few of them: what the author says may be true and yet by no means the truth. That is the novelist’s touch. It falsifies life.

Well, the novelist’s touch as thus defined is, of course, bad in biography, for no human being is simple. {[But in a novel it has its place: a novel that is at all complex often requires flat people as well as round,]  
**CP5A-CLAIM** + [and the outcome of their collisions parallels life ~~more~~

accurately than Mr. Douglas implies.}] **CP5B-SUPPORT** The case of Dickens is significant. Dickens' people are nearly all flat (Pip and David Copperfield attempt roundness, but so diffidently that they seem more like bubbles than solids). {[Nearly every one can be summed up in a sentence,] **CP1** + [and yet there is this wonderful feeling of human depth.]} **CP2B-SUPPORT** Probably the immense vitality of Dickens causes his characters to vibrate a little, so that they borrow his life and appear to lead one of their own. It is a conjuring trick; at any moment we may look at Mr. Pickwick edgewise and find him no thicker than a gramophone record. But we never get the sideway view. Mr. Pickwick is far too adroit and well-trained. He always has the air of weighing something, and when he is put into the cupboard of the young ladies' school he seems as heavy as Falstaff in the buck-basket at Windsor. ~~{[Part of the genius of Dickens is that he~~ does use types and caricatures, people whom we recognize the instant they re-enter,] **CP2A-CLAIM** + [and yet achieves effects that are not mechanical and a vision of humanity that is not shallow.]} **CP2B-SUPPORT** Those who dislike Dickens have an excellent case. He ought to be bad. [He is actually one of our big writers, and his immense success with types suggests that there may be more in flatness than the severer critics admit.]} **CP2B-SUPPORT**

(Forster, 1956)

\* The crossed out text indicates those text segments within the CPs to which the deletion macrorule was applied. The generalization macrorule was applied to the segments with wavy underlining.

## Appendix B

### The Content Points in the Sample Guided Summary Writing Task and the Macrorules to be Applied to Them

**CP1** (description): Flat characters can be described very briefly. [MR: Selection]

**CP2A** (claim): Flat characters can be easily recognized, so they are powerful tools for the writer. [MR: Selection]

**CP2B** (support): Flat characters are familiar, stable, evoke a specific mood, and are not truly simple. [MR: Generalization + Selection]

**CP3A** (claim): Flat characters are easily remembered. [MR: Selection]

**CP3B** (support): Flat characters are stable, consoling, and enduring. [MR: Generalization]

**CP4A** (claim): Flat characters satisfy an important reader expectation. [MR: Selection]

**CP4B** (support): Due to their stasis and regularity, flat characters are the safe havens readers of all sophistication levels need. [MR: Generalization + Selection]

**CP5A** (claim): Flat characters are needed in a complex novel. [MR: Selection]

**CP5B** (support): Novels with no flat characters lack realism. [MR: Selection]

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## Appendix C

### The Analytical Frameworks Used for Task Analysis and Composition Process Comparison

#### 1. Analytical framework for task analysis

*Points of comparison:*

- Task type: Integrated vs. independent writing task
- Purpose: language teaching/assessment task
- Type of response: the length and nature of the constructed response
- Directness of the relationship: text- or content-responsible vs. stimulus-related writing in terms of source use
- Language skills: number and type of skills involved
- Input form: one or mixed semiotic modes
- Number of source texts: number of different texts provided in the input
- Authenticity: degree of simulation of actual language-use situations
- Familiarity with academic reading and writing: degree of previous experience required
- Topical characteristics of the input: thematic relatedness of the source texts
- Propositional content: nature and distribution of the propositions in the text base

#### 2. Analytical framework for task completion process analysis

*Points of comparison:*

- Task representation: task schema and interpretation of task demands
- Task management ability: amount of previous experience with the task type required

- 
- Scope of relationship: amount of input to be processed for the expected response
  - Meaning construction: mental text representations constructed during reading and writing
  - Task completion phases: separability and mutual dependence of the task completion phases
  - Cognitive operation 1: Organization (reading and writing purpose-dependent, individual mental representation of the input texts and of the relevant propositional content according to the text to be written)
  - Cognitive operation 2: Selection (reading and writing goal dependent application of relevance principles)
  - Cognitive operation 3: Connection (content generation through relating propositional content and previous knowledge by means of inference and elaboration during reading and invention during writing)
  - Macrorule use: selecting and constructing (macro)propositions