Sick of the Word ‘Synthesize’ Yet? – A Simple Look at How Synthesis Looks

When asked to synthesize (you're going to despise that word by the end of your program, btw 😞), many people fall into the trap of summarizing articles and/or giving 'my topic 101' information.

Let's say my topic is Childhood Obesity, and I've read three articles on it. When you read such articles you can create a matrix.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Childhood Obesity</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Fast Food</th>
<th>No Exercise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article 1 Marks 2005</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Children consume 80% more ff now than 10 years ago (p. 254)</td>
<td>Children spend, on ave. 26 hours a week sitting playing video games (p. 258)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 2 Scoff (2009)</td>
<td>Parents work late and kids come home and snack and stay inside (p. 345) Parents are tired and don’t want to do much exercise themselves (p. 345)</td>
<td>FF has been cited as a main cause of child. Ob. (p. 255)</td>
<td>Children have rooms with their own tv, computers and no need to go outside and play (p. 346)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 3 Horton (2006)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Even on the way to or from school sports, ff drive-thrus provide meal of choice for most (p.127)</td>
<td>Schools are cutting recess time. (p. 193)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Schools are cutting PE time and rigor (p. 193)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now you see that the articles are about Childhood Obesity, *but more so*, they are geared toward
discussing what has caused it. Also note what isn’t there – solutions for the problem. You now have your main points to discuss and to synthesize.

So my introductory paragraph might read like this:

Childhood Obesity has become a topic of national concern. The high rate of obese children has the NFL offering its Play60 program, and has prompted Michelle Obama to instigate the Get Up and Move initiative. Across the literature on Childhood Obesity, researchers are concerned with causation. Some researchers point to external factors like schools’ redacted exercise programs and fast food establishments, while others suggest parents may play a significant role.

Paragraph 2:

Both Marks (2005) and Horten (2006) have discussed fast food as an integral component of childhood obesity. Marks (2005) has noted that children consume 80% more fast food now than 10 years ago. Beyond the statistic, Horten (2006) has provided an irony in that fast food is present even on the way to or from sporting events. Children may be undoing their active calorie burns with drive-thru stops.

Paragraph 3:

Parenting, according to the articles, is involved in Childhood Obesity. The consumption of fast food, while contributing to Childhood Obesity, appears to be a by-product of parenting in an on-the-go society. The parents are the ones driving the cars through the drive-thru lanes. The on-
the-go parenting that steers towards easy, unhealthy food, also results in fatigued parents who do not want to do much when they return from work. Scoff (2009) has offered that parents, coming home from hectic work days, are not inclined to want to exercise or play, themselves. Mark’s (2005) point about the hours children are allowed to play video games, indirectly supports the notion of tired parents who may not police their children’s activities in exchange for needed down time.

Paragraph 4:

Research suggests that a significant cause of obesity is sedentary lifestyles. In the past, children would play outside, sometimes until dark. Scoff (2009) has revealed that today's children have scheduled play dates in limited time spaces. Children also possess their own technology in their rooms, making them more likely to stay in to 'play' (Scoff, 2009). The amount of indoor 'play' while sitting can be 26 hours on average per child (Marks, 2005). In addition, schools have cut back on recess time and on P.E. classes (Horten, 2006). The literature provides a sampling of the forces that conspire to make a perfect storm of inactivity, and, potentially obesity.

Paragraph 5:

None of the articles offer solutions to these causes. While Horten (2006) has implied that schools' cuts on recess and P.E. contribute to obesity, he has neither outright blamed schools for it, nor has he called for a policy reversal. Similarly, Marks (2005) has eluded to parents being responsible, but has not offered concrete solutions to their fatigue or drive-thru proclivities.

SO - what you see here is, the topic is Childhood Obesity, but what I noticed after matrixing (my
word) my sources is that they really all are exploring causes AND none offered solutions. I present those ideas, their similarities, intersections and disconnects and that is what makes for synthesis.

A non-synthesized paper would state: Article 1 says this about obesity. Article 2 says this. Article 3 says this. That is merely a summary presentation of what each article says about obesity.