



Taking Notes

Tips on note-taking

- Use four-by-six or three-by-five-inch note cards. Some people prefer using a different size or color to avoid mixing the note cards up with the working bibliography cards.
- Use ink because pencils might blur after the note cards have been shuffled.
- Write one type of information from one source on each note card. If you have more than one type of information from the same source, use a different note card for that information.
- On the note card, write the name of the author of your source and the page numbers where you found the information.
- Label or put titles on the note cards using the major and minor ideas from your preliminary outlines. This will help you in grouping note cards from different sources based on the type of information that they have.
- For advanced writers, you can use a different color of ink to write down any personal thoughts that come to you as you write the notes. For instance, if your notes are written in blue, your personal thought could be written on the same card in black. Others prefer writing personal thoughts on a separate card and stapling it to the back of the associated note card.
- In note taking, it is important that you understand what constitutes plagiarism and how you can avoid it. (Look in the *Citing Sources* handout series for handouts on plagiarism and how to avoid it.)

How to take notes

Summary: This is a brief sketch that sums up the important ideas from a primary or secondary source. It shows your understanding of the source and gives the reader a general view of that source. The following is an example of a plot summary, primary source, of Romeo and Juliet.

Romeo and Juliet	Shakespeare
This is a dramatic portrayal of a love that defies hate and even death. This play involves two young people whose love for each other is complicated by the hatred between their family members. The conflicts that result from this forbidden love end in the death of the young lovers, who decided that neither hate nor death could keep them from being together.	

Paraphrase: A method in which you use information from a source, but express it briefly in your own words. In this case, you are using another writer's idea or opinion, but you are rewriting it in your own language.

Tips on paraphrasing:

1. Maintain the original author's tone; that is keep moods of grief, anger, satire, resolution, etc. the same.
2. Retain some exceptional expressions from the original writer's material.

3. Document the source of the material since the idea or opinion was borrowed.

The following is an extract from Alexander Pope's poem, "An Essay on Man," followed by an example of how a student might paraphrase his idea.

Presumptuous Man! the reason wouldst thou find,
Why formed so weak, so little, and so blind?
First, if thou canst, the harder reason guess,
Why formed no weaker, no blinder, and no less?

An Essay on Man

Pope, p. 513

Pope states that man seeks to find the reason why he was "formed so weak, so little, and so blind," and yet he forgets to try and find the reasons why God did not create man worse than he perceives himself to be.

Quotation: This method of note taking involves writing another person's ideas or opinions word for word in order to develop your subject.

Tips on quotations:

1. Put quotation marks around the quoted phrase.
2. Make sure you copy the author's exact words including nonacademic sentences as in certain speech dialects.

The following is an example of a card with a direct quotation from Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Mama as the voice of reason

Hansberry, p. 1009

Mama: "I'm waiting to hear how you be your father's son. I'm waiting to hear you talk like him and say we a people who give children life, not destroy them--I'm waiting to see you stand up and look like your daddy and say we done give one baby to poverty and that we ain't going to give up nary another one . . . I'm waiting."