Note-Taking on Index Cards

Points to Remember

- Write out a working bibliography card for each source first (author, title, (editor, translator, and/or edition number if there is one), publisher, city of publication, year of publication, issue number, volume and page numbers). Number each card. (This is your source number to be referenced on your information cards.)

- On the back side of the bibliography card, jot down the call number of the book or the words you entered into any search engine, or the web-site address of a source. This will help you should you need to re-look up a source.

- Write down anything that supports or contradicts your thesis statement. It’s OK to copy down duplicating facts.

- Use more than one or two key sources - use a variety of sources to give your paper more breadth.

- In note-taking, paraphrase or quote your source - but do only one at a time! In other words, do not mix paraphrases and quotes on a card.

- Remember to put the page number(s) where you found the information on your card, and the number of your source from your working bibliography, so you know exactly where you got your info.

- DO NOT PLAGIARIZE your source!! To plagiarize means to steal a source’s words and present them as your own. Here are some guidelines:

  To PARAPHRASE your source is to put it in your own words in summary form. Change the language and sentence structure as well as the order of the words. It’s OK to keep some key words. Rule of thumb: if you copy more than 3 words in a row from a source, these words should be in quotation marks.

  To QUOTE a source means to copy it down EXACTLY as you found it (misspellings, punctuation, its type face (italics or roman) and all!). You must use quotation marks. Be sure to write down who said it.

- You don’t need to write a lot on each card - one or two sentences is usually enough.
Put a simple topic/main idea of the card at the top left of each card.
Put the source number from your working bibliography at the top right of each card.
Put the page number(s) at the bottom right of each card.
Aim to fill at least 5 cards a day (that's 25 per week) for at least 4 weeks (longer if you have time). You'll soon have 100 cards of research notes. 10-15 cards in a single sitting is not hard to do if you get on a roll.
You can record your own thoughts on index cards, too.

How to Skim Sources

- Look at the table of contents and find the chapter(s) that pertain to your topic.
- Look for headings and thoroughly read only those sections that pertain.
- Read the captions under pictures as often only the most important information is illustrated.
- Read only the first and last sentence in a paragraph when searching for information. Thoroughly read the paragraph(s) when you find the right ones.
- Look at any words that are italicized or boldfaced.

Sources:
www.bowdoin.edu
www/owl.english.purdue.edu