

Research Paper 101 Series

Step Three C: Taking Notes and Keeping them Organized

As you research, it is critical to take notes and keep them organized—this is the first step in avoiding plagiarism. You need to know where you found your information and if you are quoting it directly, paraphrasing, or summarizing. Organized notes help you to give credit where credit is due.



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1. *What note-taking method do I choose?*

Your choice of note-taking method will largely depend on your personal preference. The important thing is that you are consistent and keep track of where you found material.

Option 1: Paper-based notes

Paper based notes can include both annotated texts and notes written on a separate piece of paper or in a notebook. When keeping paper-based notes, it is essential to keep track of everything. Hole punch everything and place it in a binder, or use a bound notebook with a folder for any printed or copied materials.

A few other considerations:

- Use a new sheet of paper for each source.
- On the top of each sheet of paper, write the bibliographic information for your source.
- For each note you take, write down the page number that your information is coming from.
- After collecting all your notes, use different colours of highlighters to mark themes. This will help you find them more quickly.

Advantages: Physically writing something down can increase retention. There are potentially fewer distractions from social media. If you write faster than you type, it could save time.

Disadvantages: You may need to re-write your notes to organize them more efficiently. There is more potential to lose a notebook than a device.

Option 2: Electronic Notes

While there are multiple apps and programs for taking notes electronically, Microsoft One Note is a strong option. One Note is an electronic “notebook” which can be subdivided into sections. In turn, each section can have multiple “pages.” Documents, screenshots, spreadsheets, videos, and links can all be embedded into a page. The user can also type, voice record, or draw. Finally, One Note also gives you the ability to tag items. There are preset tags, but custom tags (i.e., topics) can also be created. Further, One Note can also be synced across devices.

The same considerations above also apply to One Note:

- Use a “page” for each source.
- On the top of each “page,” record the bibliographic information for your source.

- For each note you take, write down the page number that your information is coming from.
- After collecting all your notes, create tags to mark themes. This will help you find them more quickly.

Advantages: Typed notes can save you time in writing your paper. One Note is accessible across devices. Reorganizing your notes is as simple as copying and pasting. The full version of One Note is available to all Briercrest students through their myBriercrest account.

Disadvantages: It is easier to inadvertently plagiarize. Working on your device can potentially add distractions.



2. How do I “read” a resource?

For books, look through the table of contents and index. Identify chapters and sections in the book that pertain directly to your topic. Read the opening paragraph of the chapter to determine if the information is relevant. If it is,

- Skim the whole chapter to create context for the information.
- Focus your reading on specific sections of the chapter that directly relate to your topic.
- Pay close attention to subheadings, diagrams, bold words, etc.

For journal articles and electronic resources, read the abstract. This should help you determine if the information is relevant. If it is,

- Read the entire article to understand the author(s) argument.
- Read more carefully sections that directly pertain to your topic.
- Pay close attention to subheadings, diagrams, bold words, etc.

As you research, be an *active reader* by annotating journal articles or texts (on paper or electronically). Double underline the thesis statement. Underline important information and make a note in the margin as to why it is important. Circle any words you don't know. Write questions (?) in the margins. After you have finished reading, write a short summary of the material. If annotating directly on a text is not possible, consider using sticky notes.

3. What else do I write down?

Unless you want to directly quote something, avoid taking word for word notes. Instead use the following strategies:

- **Summarize:** In your own words, condense the material into a few sentences that give a broad overview of what you have read. What is the author's claim? What evidence is presented? What are the conclusions? This can be done for an entire article (chapter) or for smaller sections.
- **Paraphrase:** Paraphrasing is like summarizing, except more details are retained. Paraphrasing is useful for sections that are packed full of information that is key for your research paper. Again, write the paraphrase in your own words.
- **Direct Quotations:** Write these sparingly. Direct quotes should be used to highlight significant ideas and striking phrases.



Next up...Drafting a Thesis Statement