Guide to Taking Notes: The Note Card System

Taking notes is a huge part of the research process. Staying consistent and organized will help you use the information that you learned in your project effectively and without plagiarizing. This document outlines the note card system of note-taking.

You will need:
- Notecards (in three colors if possible)
- Pen/pencil
- Rubber bands, or ring clip and hole punch

In this system you will create three basic cards. The first is the bibliographic card. If using colored cards, the bibliographic cards should all be the same color. The lined side of the card should list all bibliographic information about the source including title, author, date of publication, place of publication, publisher, etc. Here is an example:

Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era	1
James M. McPherson	
Oxford University Press	
New York	
1988	

These should be the same number

1

On the blank side of the card, give each card a number. The source numbers do not need to be in any order, just number each one sequentially as you go about your research. You should also put the same number in the upper right-hand corner of the lined side.

The next card you are going to create is the ideas and quotes card. Move to the next color of cards if you have another color. Start by writing the source number (the one you used for the bibliographic card) on the blank side of the card and on the upper right corner of the lined side. On the lined side of this card, write down any ideas or quotes that stuck out to you when reading this source. These can be facts that you learned, perspectives you want to include, or anything else that you might want to use in your project. Be sure to include the page numbers that you get information from so that you can properly cite your sources. Make as many of these cards as you want, but be sure to label all of them. (You may want to include a letter on the bottom of each to keep them in order.)

1

The Civil War was about slavery (48–53)	1
President Lincoln had many opponents (57)	
"On all issues but one, antebellum southerners stood for state's rights and a weak federal government." (78)	
Border states had to choose between Union and Confederacy (276–78)	
	A

"Everything about Ewell seemed odd, from his ulcer-   1

induced diet of hulled wheat boiled in milk with raisins and

egg yolk to his manner of cursing with a lisp." (454)

B

Your final card should be your annotated card. Choose your final color for this card. On this card, you should again write down the number assigned from the bibliographic card on both the blank side and in the upper right-hand corner of the lined side. On the lined side, you need to write down what you learned from the source and how you plan to use that information in your project. Keep in mind that you do not need to write in complete sentences. Just get your thoughts down.

1

1

Learned about the origins of the Civil War and what led to

the outbreak of war in 1861.

Gave broad overview of pre-war and wartime.

Plan to use for background info and overview of Civil War.

After you have made all of your note cards for one particular source, you'll want to organize your cards. You will want to store your cards by color and in number order. One way is to punch holes into the corner of all of your cards and keep them on ring clips. You can also use rubber bands to hold them together; just make sure you keep all of them in the same place (a storage box, specific drawer, etc.). Keep in mind that you will want to have your note cards easily accessible when researching.

Using this note card system will help to keep things organized throughout your entire project. Whatever system you use, be sure to stay consistent and to take notes diligently.