

# Reading to Write: Record-Keeping and Note-Making Strategies

In order to write informed, focused, and well-argued papers, you must not only conduct research, but also read and record that research *before* writing. By doing this, you can easily use your detailed and organized notes to draft your paper.

## Record Keeping

- **Download, save, bookmark, and/or print your research materials**
  - Create and label a unique folder on your computer for your assignment research. Here, you can save your downloaded articles. It is a good idea to save your .pdf downloads with filenames that allow you to find the article quickly, such as the author's last name and a shortened version of the article title.
  - If you are using websites, bookmark specific pages.
  - If you are photocopying or scanning a chapter from a book, be sure to indicate on the print out or digital file where the chapter is from, the author, and the page range.
  - Print important articles so that you can highlight, write notes in the margins, and attach sticky notes.
  
- **Label your notes**
  - Before you begin reading your books, articles and web-based resources, record bibliographic information for each source at the beginning of your note page (depending on the type of publication, this may include date of publication, title of publication, journal title, place of publication and publisher, page range, web URL).
  - Create a word doc master list of sources you are using in the citation style (APA, MLA, Chicago etc.) that your instructor requires. Creating this "bibliographic trail" is crucial to essay organization and helps ensure you get your citations right from the beginning.
  - To maintain order, number your note pages as you continue read and make notes.

## Note-Making

Once you have determined your topic of focus and searched for and identified relevant scholarly and web-based sources related to your topic, you are ready to begin actively reading, which must involve making notes. Effective note-taking means moving beyond passive underlining or highlighting. Note-taking while reading will help you read with purpose and understanding, keep you organized, help you avoid plagiarism, and ultimately save time.

- **Summarize:** The goal of summarization is to identify and express the main ideas and concepts in a text using clear and precise language. Your aim is to put the identified concepts into your own words, yet not lose sight of the author's intended meaning. A good strategy is to ask yourself: what are the most important points in the passage I have just read?

### NOTE-MAKING TIP:

*Create headings and labels based on important concepts, themes or definitions in the text and then explain and elaborate with bulleted points.*

Being able to consolidate a lot of information into a few sentences requires analytical thinking. While you need to be careful not to rely too heavily on summary at the expense of learning and recording specific details and key terms, being able to summarize effectively is a necessary skill that can help prevent plagiarism.

- **Annotate:** This involves recording your reactions to, interpretations of, and questions about a text as you read it. This can involve:
  - highlighting, underlining, or asterisking important passages
  - writing comments, definitions, and questions in the margins of a text
  - connecting ideas with lines and arrows and numbering related points
  - bracketing sections of a text
  - using sticky notes to write important vocabulary, reduce information to key terms and ideas, and to ask questions

### NOTE-MAKING TIP:

*You can annotate .pdf files on-screen by using Adobe's highlighting and commenting functions. Be sure to save your work!*

- **Record specifics:** As you read, record in your notes any passages that you think you may want to directly quote while drafting your essay. Copy the passage word for word in your notes, place the passage in quotation marks (" "), and indicate the **page number** where you found the passage. Direct quotes should be used sparingly in note-making, usually when the author expresses ideas in an appealing or unique way.

You should frequently record page numbers from which you pull *any* information in your note taking. This will allow you to quickly reference specific sections of the text later, if required.

Content derived in part from The University of Toronto Writing Centre and Rise B. Axelrod and Charles R. Cooper, *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing*, 10<sup>th</sup> edition (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2013).