

3 TAKING EFFECTIVE NOTES AND AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

Good notes will make the most of your reading. That doesn't mean slowing to a crawl to write down everything. You're not a human photocopier. Rather, it means focusing on important books and articles—the ones that really matter to your research—and then summarizing their chief points, crucial data, and major ideas so you can draw on them later.

To take effective notes, you should think about what you'll be using them for. One is to learn more about your subject. Another is to find specific sources dealing with specific points in your thesis. A third is to help you categorize and synthesize the work of others so you can situate your work within the wider field. The fourth and most important goal is to spur your own well-informed ideas.

Taking notes is mental work, not menial work. And that work will find its way into your thesis: the broad learning, the specific sources, the synthesis of materials, and your original ideas. To meet these goals, your notes should

- Capture the main points of each article
- Focus on parts of the work most closely related to your topic
- Use clear markings to distinguish your comments from the author's language, preventing any accidental plagiarism
- Record the bibliographic information you need for citation
- Develop your own insights, as prompted by the readings, so you can draw on them later

I should add that these notes should be written or typed, not simply marked on photocopies. It's fine to copy articles and underline some sentences, though you should *never* mark a library volume. The real problem is that underlined sentences and a few marginal comments are not effective notes. To make your notes worthwhile, you need to extract the main points from each reading and express them in your words. You might add some

critical comments or ideas of your own, connecting the reading to your topic.

Then, once you have taken such valuable notes, don't file them away. Out of sight, out of mind. Take them out occasionally and review them as you develop your thesis project. Going over them will jog your memory and prompt new ideas.

Tip: Don't file away your notes. Review them regularly. That may seem like a waste of time since you've "already finished them." Actually, it's quite valuable since it will remind you of important points and suggest new ones.

CAPTURE THE MAIN POINTS OF EACH ARTICLE

First, make sure your notes capture the heart of what you are reading, phrased in your own words. For example:

My summary: Milton Friedman argues that the Great Depression was caused by a contraction in the money supply. The problem got worse, he says, as banks failed in the early 1930s and the Federal Reserve refused to print more money. He rejects Keynesian explanations that there was a "liquidity trap," or that the Depression could have been solved by higher government spending. For Friedman, the real problem was America's plummeting money supply, not inadequate government demand.

To produce summaries like this, you not only need to read the article; you need to review the introduction, conclusion, and abstract. Then you need to ask yourself, "What is the author's main point?" To figure that out, look away from the article, try to state the main point to yourself, and then write it down.

What if you can't do that? Then you missed the main point. It's much better to know that now than to discover it later. You need to look at the work again, at least briefly, and take another stab at summarizing the main point.

Tip: Your notes on each book, article, or Web site should include a brief summary in your own words. To do that, you should look away from the article, think about its main point (probably only one; rarely more than two or three), and write it down.

Naturally, you also want to include more detailed notes along with your summary. If some ideas are presented on specific pages, rather than throughout the article, your notes should reflect that. For example:

U.S. money supply contracted more in 1932 and 1933 than in 1929 (pp. 55–59).

This pagination will be important later when you start writing. Detailed citations help your readers, who may want to look up a point or check some data you present.

Before completing your notes, pause and reflect on the article as a whole. You might want to add something to your summary or include some additional comments and criticism of your own. If the article prompts some questions, jot them down, too, so you can talk them over with your adviser. To make these queries stand out, I put two question marks at the beginning. For example:

?? Why did the government allow the money supply to contract?

Tip: If you don't understand something you've read, flag it with a question mark. Keep a list of these questions and raise them with your adviser or other teachers.

In my experience, most of us spend far too little time thinking about what we've just read compared to the time spent reading it. That's as true for faculty as it is for students. After ninety minutes poring over an article, we close the journal with relief and go directly to the next task or, more likely, stroll out for a well-deserved pizza. Far better to spend eighty-six or eighty-seven minutes reading and three or four minutes simply thinking about what the article says. Same time, better results. You'll understand the material more thoroughly. You'll see more connections to your thesis project.

You may even come up with some ideas of your own (which you should jot down right away).

Tip: After you finish a book or article, spend a couple of minutes just thinking about it. Try to restate the main points to yourself. Ask yourself what you learned from it. As you mull over this reading, be sure to jot down any additional ideas it prompts about your own work.

FOCUS ON ARTICLES AND BOOK CHAPTERS CLOSELY RELATED TO YOUR TOPIC

As you read, it's important to concentrate on works closely tied to your thesis topic. Early in the project, as you immerse yourself in the subject, you need to do some general background reading. A little meandering is par for the course, and it's fine. But as your topic takes shape, your focus should become clearer, sharper.

Maintaining this focus is particularly important when you read longer books. Some parts may bear on your thesis, but others do not. Read shrewdly. Use the table of contents and the index. Feel free to skip some chapters and skim others. You have my permission! Zero in on the key material in your reading and in your notes. Your goal is to extract what you need without getting bogged down in the rest. Remember: *You are reading to write.*

Tip: Read selectively.

- Don't read everything; focus on works directly related to your topic.
- Don't read everything at the same speed; read the most important works more carefully.
- Remember that you are reading to write.

TAKING NOTES WITH Q-QUOTES

Some honest writers find themselves in hot water, accused of plagiarism, because their notes are so bad they cannot tell what they copied and

what they wrote themselves. You can avoid that by clearly distinguishing your words from others.¹

All you need is a simple way to identify quotes and keep them separate from your own words and ideas.

The common solution—using ordinary quotation marks in your notes—doesn't actually work so well in practice. For one thing, quotation marks are small, so it's easy to overlook them later when you return to your notes to write a paper. Second, they don't tell you which page the quote comes from, something you need to know for proper citations. Third, if there's a quote within a quote, it's hard to keep your markings straight.

There's a better way. To avoid all this confusion, simply use the letter Q and the page number to begin all quotations in your notes. To end the quote, write Q again. It's painless, and it's easy to spot the Q's when you read your notes and write your papers.

Example of Q-quotes used to identify exact words:

Q236 Goya's paintings of the civil war in Spain, now two centuries old, are still vivid, immediate, and chilling.Q

Begin your notes for each new book, article, and Web site by writing down the author, title, and other essential data. (The exact information you need is described later in this chapter and in appendix 2: "Footnotes 101.") You'll need this information for each book, article, and Web site you use. With this publication data plus Q-quotes, you'll be able to cite effectively from your own notes, without having to return to the original publication.

1. The next several pages are drawn from my book *Doing Honest Work in College: How to Prepare Citations, Avoid Plagiarism, and Achieve Real Academic Success* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), chapter 3. I have made some changes to the original text.

Tip (and example) on how to begin notes:

- Top of page 1: bibliographic information and call number
- After that: your notes about the text, including Q-quotes

For example:

Michael Ryan, *Literary Theory: A Practical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999). PN45 .R93 .1999

Q26 Structuralists applied the insights of linguistics to literature and culture.Q

Some of the earliest structuralists were Russian formalists in 1920s (pp. 26–27).

This system is simple, clear, and effective. It works equally well for typed and handwritten notes. It easily handles quotes within quotes. Looking at your notes, you'll know exactly which words are the author's and which page they are on. You'll know if he is quoting anyone else. And you'll know that anything *outside* the Q-quotes is your own paraphrase. In this example, you know that the observation about linguistics is a direct quote, the one about Russian formalists is your paraphrase.

Tip on paraphrasing: Make sure your paraphrase does not closely resemble the author's words. When in doubt, double-check your wording against the original.

EXAMPLE OF A MORE COMPLICATED QUOTE

Because quotes can be complicated, let's see how these Q-quotes work in more detail. First, some quotes begin on one page and end on another. To show where the page break falls, insert a double slash (//) inside the quote. (A double slash stands out, just as Q does.) That way, if you use only part of the quote, you can cite the correct page without having to chase down the original again. To illustrate:

Q132–33 Samuel Eliot Morison was not only a great historian, he was an experienced sailor. His life-long love of the sea // is apparent in his work.

It gives special depth to his treatment of the European voyages of discovery.Q

The first sentence is on page 132; the next one is on both pages; the third is only on page 133. Using Q-quotes with a double slash gives you all this information quickly and easily.

Tip: After writing down a quotation, compare your notes to the original to ensure you have transcribed it correctly.

Quotes can be complicated in other ways, too. You may wish to cut out some needless words or add a few to make the quote understandable. Fortunately, there are straightforward rules to handle both changes.

SHORTENING QUOTATIONS WITH ELLIPSES . . .

Although quotes need to be exact, you are allowed to shorten them if you follow two rules. First, your cuts cannot change the quote's meaning. Second, you must show the reader exactly where you omitted any words. That's done with an ellipsis, which is simply three dots . . . with spaces before and after each one.

If the omitted words come in the middle of a sentence, an ellipsis is all you need. Take this original sentence:

Original I jogged around the park, which took at least an hour, and returned home exhausted. Naturally, I took a shower. Then I had dinner and watched a movie before falling asleep.

Here's a shortened version of the first sentence, with an ellipsis to show the omission:

Shortened, I jogged around the park . . . and returned home exhausted.

If the two parts of your quote come from two separate sentences, use an ellipsis plus a period (that is, three dots plus a period) to separate the two parts. Here's an example, joining the first and last sentences:

Shortened, ellipsis and period I jogged around the park . . . and watched a movie before falling asleep.

Here's another example:

Original I walked downtown. After walking more than thirty minutes, I rounded the corner and saw her.

Shortened 1 I walked . . . and saw her.

Shortened 2 I walked . . . more than thirty minutes.

Explanation Both shortened sentences use three ellipses plus a period. In the first, the period comes immediately after the word "downtown," because that's where the period falls in the original sentence. In the second, there is a space before the period because the original sentence continues.

Omissions like these are perfectly acceptable as long as you signal them (with ellipses) and you don't change the quoted author's meaning.

ADDING WORDS [IN BRACKETS] TO CLARIFY A QUOTE

Occasionally, you need to add a word or two to clarify a quote. Perhaps the original sentence uses a pronoun instead of a person's name. For clarity, you might wish to include the name. Again, you cannot change the quote's meaning, and you need to signal the reader that you are modifying it slightly. You do that by using [brackets] to show exactly what you have inserted. Consider this original text:

Original Q46 Hamlet is one of Shakespeare's most complex and enduring characters. When he appears onstage, the action quickens as the young prince's rage melds with his madness.Q

Now, let's say you want to quote only the second sentence. An exact quote wouldn't make much sense since the reader won't know who "he" is. To correct that, you need to add a word in brackets to make it clear that you've added it to the original:

Your quote with brackets "When [Hamlet] appears onstage, the action quickens as the young prince's rage melds with his madness."

That's an accurate quote even though you added a bracketed word. If you added the same word without brackets, however, it would be a misquotation.

Or, to take our earlier quote, you might say, "Naturally, I took a shower [after jogging]." That's fine. What you cannot say is "Naturally, I took a shower [after bicycling]." That's a misquotation and a distortion, perhaps a deliberate one. Big mistake.

Follow the rule: Additions [with brackets] and omissions (with ellipses . . .) should not change the quote's meaning in any way. The quoted statement belongs to another writer, not to you. You're welcome to praise it or to damn it, but not to twist it.

QUOTES WITHIN QUOTES

The phrase you are quoting may itself contain a quotation. One advantage of using Q-quotes for your notes is that you can simply put quotation marks wherever they appear in the text. For example: Q47 He smiled and asked for "a double latte with skim milk, please" and she walked over to the machine to make it.Q Since you are using Q's to mark off the entire quote, there will be no confusion later when you write a paper with these notes.

USING Q-QUOTES TO HANDLE COMPLICATED QUOTATIONS

Now that we've covered the basics of Q-quotes plus ellipses, brackets, and quotes within quotes, you are equipped to handle even the most complex quotes accurately, first in your notes and then in your thesis writing. To illustrate that, let's combine all these elements in one example:

Q186-87 Boswell's biography of Samuel // Johnson is a wondrous work. It not only invented the genre, it remains the finest example. . . . The writer and [his subject, Dr. Johnson] are perfectly joined, and Johnson is, as one critic said, "surely one of the great figures of his age, or any other."Q

This notation makes the following things clear:

- Only the first few words appear on page 186; the rest are on page 187.
- Some words from the original are omitted after the word “example.”
- There is a period after “example” and then an ellipsis (three dots), indicating that the omission does not come in the middle of a sentence. Rather, it separates two sentences.
- The bracketed words, “his subject, Dr. Johnson,” are not in the original text.
- The final words are actually a quotation from someone else. They are included as a quote by the author you are citing.

With clear notation like this, you will be able to cite portions of this complicated quote later, without returning to the original article and with no chance of accidental plagiarism. It's not difficult. Actually, it takes more time to explain it than to use it!

PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC HONESTY

Because the Q-quote system prevents confusion over who wrote what, it eliminates a major source of plagiarism: simple mistakes caused by bad notes. Of course, that's not the only reason for plagiarism. Students rushing to finish a paper may forget to include the necessary citations. Some are sloppy. Others don't understand the citation rules. Sadly, a few cheat deliberately.

Whatever the cause, plagiarism is a serious violation of academic rules—for undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty alike. The rules are the same for everybody. Misrepresenting someone else's words or ideas as your own constitutes fraud. It is a basic principle of academic integrity that when you say you did the work yourself, you actually did it. Likewise, when you rely on someone else's work, you cite it. When you use someone else's words, you quote them openly and accurately. When you present research materials, you present them fairly and truthfully. Quotations, data, experiments, and the ideas of others should never be falsified or distorted. These are basic principles of academic honesty.²

2. These principles are explained in *Doing Honest Work in College*, chapter 1.

CITE OTHERS' WORK TO AVOID PLAGIARISM

Citation rules follow from these principles of openness and honesty. If the words are someone else's, they must be clearly marked as quotations, either by quotation marks or block indentation (for longer quotes), followed by a citation in a footnote, an endnote, or an in-text note, depending on your paper's citation style. It's not enough merely to mention an author's name. If it's a direct quote, use quotation marks and a full citation in a note. If it's a paraphrase of someone else's words, use your own language, not a close imitation of the work being cited, and include a proper citation.

The same rules apply to visual images, architectural drawings, databases, graphs, statistical tables, spoken words, and information taken from the Internet. If you use someone else's work, cite it. Cite it even if you think the work is wrong and you intend to criticize it. Cite it even if the work is freely available in the public domain. Cite it even if the author gave you permission to use the work. All these rules follow from the same idea: Acknowledge what you take from others. The only exception is when you rely on commonly known information. When you say the world is round, you don't need to cite Christopher Columbus.

The penalties for violating these rules are serious. For students, they can lead to failed courses and even expulsion. For faculty, they can lead to demotion, loss of tenure, or outright dismissal. The penalties are severe because honesty is central to academic life and the pursuit of knowledge.

Tips on avoiding plagiarism: When in doubt, give credit by citing the original source.

- If you use an author's exact words, enclose them in quotation marks and include a citation in a footnote, an endnote, or an in-text note. If the quote is longer, use block indentation (without quotation marks), followed by a citation in a note.
- If you paraphrase another author, use your own language. Don't imitate the original. Be sure to include a citation.
- If you rely on or report someone else's ideas, credit their source, whether you agree with them or not.

USING THE INTERNET WITHOUT PLAGIARIZING

You need to be especially alert to these citation issues when you use the Web. Internet research is very efficient, especially when you don't need to read long stretches of text. You can do extensive targeted searches, quickly check out multiple sources, access sophisticated databases, click on article summaries or key sentences, and then drag-and-drop material into your notes. That's all perfectly fine. In fact, it's often the best way to conduct research. But it's also crucial to be a good bookkeeper. You need to use a simple, consistent method to keep straight what some author said and what you paraphrased. After all, you have to cite Web sources just as you do print sources.

The easiest way is to stick with the method you use for printed books and articles: *Put Q-quotes around everything you drag-and-drop from electronic sources*. You can supplement that, if you wish, by coloring the author's text red or blue, or by using a different font. Just be consistent. That way you won't be confused in three or four weeks, when you are reviewing your notes and writing your paper.

One more thing: Be sure to write down the Web site's address so you can cite it or return to it for more research. Just copy the URL into your notes. It's probably a good idea to include the date you accessed it, too. Some citation styles ask for it. If the item appears in a database and has a document identification number, copy that, too. It's very helpful for finding the document again.

QUOTING AND PARAPHRASING WITHOUT PLAGIARIZING:
A TABLE OF EXAMPLES

A simple example can illustrate how to quote and paraphrase properly, and how to avoid some common mistakes. The following table shows the main rules for citation and academic honesty, using a sentence written by "Jay Scrivener" about Joe Blow. I'll use footnote superscript 99 to show when that sentence is cited.

QUOTING WITHOUT PLAGIARIZING

Joe Blow was a happy man, who often walked down the road whistling and singing. Sentence in the book *Joe Blow: His Life and Times*, by Jay Scrivener.

WHAT'S RIGHT

"Joe Blow was a happy man, who often walked down the road whistling and singing."⁹⁹ Correct: Full quote is inside quotation marks, followed by citation to *Joe Blow: His Life and Times*.
According to Scrivener, Blow "often walked down the road whistling and singing."⁹⁹ Correct: Each partial quote is inside quote marks, followed by citation. The partial quotes are not misleading.
"Joe Blow was a happy man," writes Scrivener.⁹⁹ Correct: Partial quote is inside quotation marks; nonquoted materials are outside. The paraphrase (about singing tunes to himself) accurately conveys the original author's meaning without mimicking his actual words. Citation properly follows the sentence.

According to Scrivener, Blow was "a happy man," who often showed it by singing tunes to himself.⁹⁹ Correct: Two partial quotes are each inside quotation marks; nonquoted materials are outside. Citation properly follows sentence.

Joe Blow seemed like "a happy man," the kind who enjoyed "whistling and singing."⁹⁹ Correct: This paraphrase is fine. It's not too close to Scrivener's original wording. The citation acknowledges the source.

Joe appeared happy and enjoyed whistling and singing to himself.⁹⁹ Correct: This paraphrase is fine. It's not too close to Scrivener's original wording. The citation acknowledges the source.

WHAT'S WRONG

Joe Blow was a happy man, who often walked down the road whistling and singing. (no citation) Wrong: It is plagiarism to quote an author's exact words or to paraphrase them closely without both quotation marks and proper citation. Acknowledge your sources!

Joe Blow was a happy man, who often walked down the road whistling and singing.⁹⁹

Joe Blow was a happy man and often walked down the road singing and whistling. (no citation)

Joe Blow was a happy man. (no citation)

Joe Blow often walked down the road whistling and singing. (no citation)

Joe Blow appeared to be “a happy man” and often walked down the road whistling and singing.⁹⁹

Wrong: These are actually Scrivener’s exact words. It is plagiarism to use them without indicating explicitly that it is a quote. It is essential to use quotation marks (or block indentation for longer quotes), even if you give accurate citation to the author. This example is wrong, then, because it doesn’t use quotation marks, even though it cites the source.

Wrong: Although the words are not exactly the author’s, they are very similar. (The words “singing” and “whistling” are simply reversed.) Either use an exact quote or paraphrase in ways that are clearly different from the author’s wording.

Wrong: There are two problems here. First, it’s an exact quote so it should be quoted and cited. Second, even if the quote were modified slightly, Scrivener should still be cited because it is his personal judgment (and not a simple fact) that Joe Blow is happy.

Wrong: Same two problems as the previous example: (1) exact words should be both quoted and cited, and (2) Scrivener’s personal judgment needs to be credited to him.

Wrong: Despite the citation, some of Scrivener’s exact words are outside the quotation marks. That creates the misleading impression that the words are original, rather than Scrivener’s. This is a small violation, like going a few miles over the speed limit. But if such miscitations occur often or include significant portions of text, then they can become serious cases of plagiarism.

“Joe Blow was an anxious man, who often ran down the road.”⁹⁹

Wrong: The quote is not accurate. According to Scrivener, Joe Blow was not anxious; he was “happy.” And he didn’t run, he “walked.” Although this misquotation is not plagiarism, it is an error. You should quote properly, and your work should be reliable. If such mistakes are repeated, if they are seriously misleading, or, worst of all, if they appear to be intentional, they may be considered academic fraud. (Plagiarism is fraud, too, but a different kind.)

Joe Blow “walked down the road” quietly.⁹⁹

Wrong: The words inside the partial quotation are accurate, but the word following it distorts Scrivener’s plain meaning. Again, this is not plagiarism, but it does violate the basic principle of presenting materials fairly and accurately. If such mistakes are repeated or if they show consistent bias (for example, to prove Joe Blow is a quiet person or hates music), they may be considered a type of academic fraud. At the very least, they are misleading.

WHEN YOU RELY HEAVILY ON A SOURCE, SAY SO

The “Joe Blow” table refers to single sentences, but some citation issues involve paragraphs or whole sections of your paper. Let’s say you are writing about European rivalries before World War I and one part of your paper relies on Paul Kennedy’s analysis of the subject. Whether or not you quote Kennedy, you should include several citations of his work in that section, reflecting its importance for your paper. You could accomplish the same thing by including an explanatory citation early in the section. The footnote or endnote might say, “My analysis in this section draws heavily on Paul M. Kennedy’s work, particularly *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860–1914* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), 410–31.” Or you could include a similar comment in the text itself. Whichever you choose, give readers fair notice that you are leaning on Kennedy. Of course, you still need to include citations for any direct quotes.

Tip: Tell readers when you are relying heavily on a particular source. You can explain that

- In the text itself
 - In a descriptive footnote or endnote
 - By citing the author multiple times
- Any of these is fine.

PARAPHRASING

When you paraphrase an author's sentence, don't veer too close to her words. That's plagiarism, *even if it's unintentional and even if you cite the author.*

What's the best technique for rephrasing a quote? Set aside the other author's text and think about the point *you* want to get across. Write it down in your own words (with a citation) and then compare your sentence to the author's original. If they contain several identical words or merely substitute a couple of synonyms, rewrite yours. Try to put aside the other author's distinctive language and rhythm as you write. That's sometimes hard because the original sticks in your mind or seems just right. Still, you have to try. Your sentences and paragraphs should look and sound different from anyone you cite.

If you have trouble rephrasing an idea in your own words, jot down a brief note to yourself stating the point you want to make. Then back away, wait a little while, and try again. When you begin rewriting, look at your brief note but *don't look at the author's original sentence*. Once you have finished, check your new sentence against the author's original. You may have to try several times to get it right. Don't keep using the same words again and again. Approach the sentence from a fresh angle. If you still can't solve the problem, give up and use a direct quote (perhaps a whole sentence, perhaps only a few key words). It should either be a direct quote or your distinctive rephrasing. It cannot be lip-synching.

Why not use direct quotes in the first place? Sometimes that's the best solution—when the author's language is compelling or when it says something important about the writer. When Franklin Roosevelt spoke about the attack on Pearl Harbor, he told America: "Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States of America was

suddenly and deliberately attacked³ No one would want to paraphrase that. It's perfect as it is, and it's historically significant. When you analyze novels and poems, you'll want to quote extensively to reveal the author's creative expression. Other phrases speak volumes about the people who utter them. That's why you might quote Islamic fundamentalists calling the United States "the Great Satan" or George W. Bush responding that they are "evil." Direct quotes like these convey the flavor of the conflict.

Because there are so many times when quotations are essential, you should avoid them where they're not. Overuse cheapens their value. Don't trot them out to express ordinary thoughts in ordinary words. Paraphrase. Just remember the basic rules: Cite the source and don't mimic the original language.

Tip: Choose whether to quote or paraphrase. If you paraphrase, it should not resemble the original quote.

These rules apply to the whole academic community, from freshmen to faculty. A senior professor at the U.S. Naval Academy was recently stripped of tenure for violating them. Although Brian VanDeMark had written several well-regarded books, his *Pandora's Keepers: Nine Men and the Atomic Bomb* contains numerous passages that closely resemble other books.⁴ Most were footnoted, but, as you now know, that doesn't eliminate the problem.⁵

Here are a few of the questionable passages, compiled by Robert Norris. (Norris compiled an even longer list of similarities between VanDeMark's work and his own book *Racing for the Bomb*.)⁶

3. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Joint Address to Congress Leading to a Declaration of War against Japan, December 8, 1941, <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/oddec7.html> (accessed June 1, 2004).

4. Brian VanDeMark, *Pandora's Keepers: Nine Men and the Atomic Bomb* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2003).

5. Jacques Steinberg, "U.S. Naval Academy Demotes Professor over Copied Work," *New York Times* (national edition), October 29, 2003, A23.

6. Robert Norris, *Racing for the Bomb: General Leslie R. Groves, the Manhattan Project's Indispensable Man* (South Royalton, VT: Steerforth Press, 2002).

Brian VanDeMark, *Pandora's Keepers* (2003)

"... Vannevar Bush. A fit man of fifty-two who looked uncannily like a beardless Uncle Sam, Bush was a shrewd Yankee . . ." (60)

"Oppenheimer wondered aloud if the dead at Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not luckier than the survivors, whose exposure to radiation would have painful and lasting effects." (194-195)

"To toughen him up and round him out, Oppenheimer's parents had one of his teachers, Herbert Smith, take him out West during the summer before he entered Harvard College." (82)

"For the next three months, both sides marshaled their forces. At Strauss's request, the FBI tapping of Oppenheimer's home and office phones continued. The FBI also followed the physicist whenever he left Princeton." (259)

Source: Robert Norris, "Parallels with Richard Rhodes's Books [referring to Brian VanDeMark's *Pandora's Keepers*]." History News Network Web site, <http://hnn.us/articles/1485.html> (accessed June 22, 2004). For convenience, I have rearranged the last two rows in the table, without changing the words.

Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (1986) and *Dark Sun* (1995)

"Vannevar Bush made a similar choice that spring. The sharp-eyed Yankee engineer, who looked like a beardless Uncle Sam, had left his MIT vice presidency . . ." (*Making of the Atomic Bomb*, 336)

"Lawrence found Oppenheimer weary, guilty and depressed, wondering if the dead at Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not luckier than the survivors, whose exposure to the bombs would have lifetime effects." (*Dark Sun*, 203)

"To round off Robert's convalescence and toughen him up, his father arranged for a favorite English teacher at Ethical Culture, a warm, supportive Harvard graduate named Herbert Smith, to take him out West for the summer." (*The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, 120-121)

"For the next three months, both sides marshaled their forces. The FBI tapped Oppenheimer's home and office phones at Strauss's specific request and followed the physicist whenever he left Princeton." (*Dark Sun*, 539)

Unfortunately, VanDeMark does not cite Rhodes or quote him directly in any of these passages. Some, like the last one, are virtual quotations and would raise red flags even if they occurred only once. A few others are a little too close for comfort but raise problems mostly because there are so many of them in VanDeMark's book.⁷

This is only one of several tables covering VanDeMark's poor paraphrasing or unquoted sources. Each was prepared by a different author who felt violated. According to the Naval Academy's academic dean, "The whole approach to documenting the sources of the book was flawed."⁸ The dean and VanDeMark himself attributed the problem to sloppiness rather than purposeful theft (which is why VanDeMark was demoted rather than fired). Still, the punishment was severe and shows how seriously plagiarism is taken at every level of the university.

PLAGIARIZING IDEAS

Plagiarizing doesn't just mean borrowing someone else's words. It also means borrowing someone else's ideas. Let's say you are impressed by an article comparing *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Hamlet*.⁹ The article concludes that these works are variations on a single theme: a young man's profound

7. Besides copying words and phrases from Richard Rhodes and Robert Norris, VanDeMark took passages from Greg Herken, William Lanouette, and Mary Palevsky without proper quotations or full attribution. Some passages are *not* obvious cases of plagiarism—deliberate or accidental—but some are nearly identical to other works and still others are too close for comfort. The overall pattern is troubling. These parallels between VanDeMark's work and other books are documented online with similar tables. See History News Network, "Brian VanDeMark: Accused of Plagiarism," May 31, 2003, <http://hnn.us/articles/1477.html> (accessed June 22, 2004). That page links to several tables comparing VanDeMark's wording to various authors.

8. Nelson Hernández, "Scholar's Tenure Pulled for Plagiarism: Acts Not Deliberate, Naval Academy Says," *Washington Post*, October 29, 2003, B06, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A32551-2003Oct28.html> (accessed March 5, 2004).

9. Although I thought of this comparison between the characters of Hamlet and Holden Caulfield myself, I suspected others had, too. Just to be on the safe side, I decided to do a Google search. The top item offered to sell me a term paper on the subject!

anguish and mental instability, as shown through his troubled internal monologues. If your paper incorporates this striking idea, credit the author who proposed it, *even if every word you say about it is your own*. Otherwise, your paper will wrongly imply you came up with the idea yourself. Holden Caulfield would call you a phony. The moral of the tale: It's perfectly fine to draw on others' ideas, as long as you give them credit. The only exception is when the ideas are commonplace.

Tip: Cite borrowed ideas as well as borrowed words.

DISTORTING IDEAS

A recurrent theme of this chapter is that you should acknowledge others' words and ideas and represent them faithfully, without distortion. When you paraphrase them, you should keep the author's meaning, even if you disagree with it. When you shorten a quote, you should indicate that you've shortened it and keep the essential idea.

There are really two goals here. The first is to maintain honesty in your own work. The second is to engage others' ideas fully, on a level playing field. That's the best way to confront diverse ideas, whether you agree with them or not. That's fair play, of course, but it's more than that. It's also how you make your own work better. You are proving the mettle of your approach by passing a tough, fair test—one that compares your ideas to others without stacking the deck in your favor.

The danger is setting up straw men, constructing flimsy arguments you can knock down without much effort. That's not only dishonest; it's intellectually lazy. Believe me, your own position will be much stronger and more effective if you confront the best opposing arguments, presented fairly, and show why yours is better.

Tip: When you use others' words or ideas, don't distort them. Confront their real ideas, not a pale imitation.

THE RIGHT WAY TO PARAPHRASE AND CITE: A SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

To summarize, the rules for citation and paraphrasing are based on a few core ideas:

- You are responsible for your written work, including the ideas, facts, and interpretations you include.
- Unless you say otherwise, every word you write is assumed to be your own.
- When you rely on others' work or ideas, acknowledge it openly.
 - When you use their ideas or data, give them credit.
 - When you use their exact words, use quotation marks plus a citation.
- When you paraphrase, use your own distinctive voice and cite the original source. Make sure your language doesn't mimic the original. If it still does after rewriting, then use direct quotes.
- When you rely heavily on an author for part of your paper, say so.
- When you draw on others' work, present it fairly. No distortions. No straw men.
- When you present empirical material, show where you acquired it so others can check the data for themselves. (The exception is commonly known material, which does not need to be cited.)

These principles of fairness and disclosure are more than simple rules for citation, more than just "good housekeeping" in your paper. They are fundamental rules for academic integrity. They promote real learning. They apply to teachers and students alike and encourage free, fair, and open discussion of ideas—the heart and soul of a university.

WRITE DOWN INFORMATION YOU NEED FOR CITATIONS

Since you will eventually want to cite many of the books and articles you read, you need to write down the full titles so you can refer to them later. If you photocopy a few pages from an article, be sure to record all the bibliographic information, including the page numbers for the whole article.

Tip: Include full citation information in your notes, on your photocopies, and in downloaded articles.

Aside from the author and title, what information do you need? That differs slightly for books, journal articles, and chapters in edited books, but the basic idea is the same. Don't be put off by the mechanics, which are not difficult and are fully discussed in appendix 2, "Footnotes 101."

For a book, you only need three pieces of information besides the author and title: the publisher's name, where it was published, and when. For this book: Charles Lipson, *How to Write a BA Thesis: A Practical Guide from Your First Ideas to Your Finished Paper* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Done.

For an article, you need to tell the reader where it appears within a particular journal. That means you need the volume and publication date, plus page numbers for the entire article: Jill Frank, "Citizens, Slaves, and Foreigners: Aristotle on Human Nature," *American Political Science Review* 98 (February 2004): 91–104.

For a chapter in an edited volume, you essentially combine the information needed for a book and an article: Gerald Feldman, "Mobilizing Economies for War," in *The Great War and the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jay Winter, Geoffrey Parker, and Mary R. Habeck (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 166–86.

If a book has been translated or is a second or third edition, include that in the citation (normally, after the title). Finally, if your information comes from the Internet, write down the full URL and the date you accessed it.

And that's it. That's basically all you need to know to cite books, articles, and Web sites. It is not hard or arcane. It's just the information anyone needs to find the material you used, all presented in standard form. In some fields, you cite this information at the bottom of the page (footnotes) or after the body of the paper (endnotes), with a bibliography at the end of the paper. Others prefer what is called "in-text" citing, such as (Frank, 2004), followed by a reference list at the end of the paper, covering only those books and articles that you have cited.

Whether you use footnotes, endnotes, or in-text citations, the information you collect is the same. Just ask your adviser which form she prefers or which one the department requires. You can find more information in appendix 2. It covers the three main citation styles in some detail and provides plenty of examples.

Tip: For details on proper citation, covering all three major citation styles, see appendix 2: "Footnotes 101."

If you need more information or want to use other citation styles, the details are provided in Charles Lipson, *Doing Honest Work in College: How to Prepare Citations, Avoid Plagiarism, and Achieve Real Academic Success* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), part 2. It is a work of exquisite beauty, and the chapters on citations are thrill-packed.

My examples in appendix 2, however, should cover most of what you need. If you have any questions about a particular footnote or endnote style, simply write out two or three citations and ask your adviser to correct them for you. It will only take a moment, and you'll be on track. Or turn to the mother lode of information on academic style, *The Chicago Manual of Style*.¹⁰

Collect citation information as you write your notes. I speak here as a reformed sinner. Many times, I've looked over my notes and found an article that came from volume 49, but I don't know what year. That means another trip to the library, mumbling under my breath. Worse, I've often stared at a single photocopied page, stuck in my files, with no idea which article it came from, which journal, or which planet. Earth, I suppose, but I'm just guessing.

DEVELOP YOUR OWN INSIGHTS AS YOU READ— AND WRITE THEM DOWN

Your reading may spark genuinely new ideas, which you want to expand and include in your thesis. That is one of the great joys of active reading, where you engage the material and respond to it. My suggestion is to write out these ideas immediately, expand on them as much as you can right away, and mark them clearly as your own. Nothing is more important than developing your own ideas on the topic, particularly when they are solidly grounded in research. So seize the moment.

Tip: Write down your ideas as you take notes. Identify them clearly as your own.

10. *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

You probably won't confuse your ideas with anyone else's work, but you might inadvertently bury them amid the notes you are taking. I avoid that by indenting my comments and putting them in brackets, beginning with my initials. For example, while reading an anthropology article, I might write:

[CL: Anthropologists' descriptions of tribal communities without formal government are remarkably similar to descriptions of the international system, where there is no overarching government, either. But there are important differences. Cultural ties and social norms are much stronger in tribal groups than in international politics.]

You could go further and highlight your comments with color, boldface, or italics. I don't do that, but I do look through my notes and copy all my comments to a special file. What matters is that I arrange these comments so I can find them easily when I want them.

SOME TIPS FOR TAKING NOTES EFFECTIVELY

As a senior, you've already taken a lot of notes in college, and by now you have your own system for doing it. Here are some additional ideas that might make your system more efficient.

- Always write down page numbers in your notes.
 - Because your thesis should attribute specific information to specific sources, you need to write down page numbers when you find key data and ideas.
- Get your information from several sources and check them against each other. Underscore any important conflicts.
- Get an overview of each book or article before reading it in detail.
 - Before reading the material carefully, read the abstract, introduction, and conclusion and skim the rest quickly. That will orient you to important materials, reinforce major points, and allow you to skip some minor chapters or sections entirely.
- When you paraphrase, use language that is truly your own, not a close imitation of the author's. It is your paper, and it should be your distinctive voice.
- Don't use highlighters.
 - I know, everybody uses them. But, in fact, they don't help and can actually hurt your work. They create two problems:

- Highlighting too many points
- Remembering too few

Highlighters create the illusion that you have thought about the main points, when all you have done is painted them.

Rather than wasting time highlighting, spend a few minutes after you finish the reading actually *thinking about the article*. What's the author's main point? What kind of evidence or arguments are used to support it?

True story: A few years ago, I ran across an old college history book of mine. One *entire* page was highlighted. Everything was solid yellow, except for one solitary sentence. I stared and stared at the unmarked sentence. As best I could tell, it was no more or less important than the others. Frankly, no sentence on that page was worth a second glance. I still have no idea why I marked them all. That page just sat there, line after line painted bright yellow, reminding me that I was completely clueless about what was really important.

- Use consistent abbreviations in your notes.
 - If your notes deal with nineteenth-century Britain, for example, you might use "CD" to mean Charles Dickens. Just remember that you need a different abbreviation for Charles Darwin.
- Transfer your handwritten notes to the computer. They will be much more usable.
- If you photocopy or download articles, make some marginal notations and underline a few crucial lines of text. (Restrain yourself from underlining much more.)

Here are the main marks I use in the margins of photocopied articles:

Mark	Meaning
NB	The most important points to be noted well, usually only one or two per article. (NB = <i>nota bene</i> = note well)
✓	Check mark, used sparingly to note important supporting points or data. Similar to NB but for less important points.
Def	Definition of key term. I sometimes add the term itself in the margin, as in "def-Democracy."
?	A question I have about the material; perhaps I don't understand it.

The main point about photocopies, though, is that you should take good notes so you don't have to return to the article itself to get ideas and information.

SOMETIMES THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF TAKING NOTES IS WHEN YOU ARE NOT WRITING

Good notes are based on your judgment about what is important in the readings and what is relevant to your thesis. You are not a stenographer, trying to write down everything you read. Be selective because, in the end, *you are reading to write your own paper.*

Your reading is part of your thesis research, and your notes should be crafted to help you in the writing process. To do that effectively, your notes should focus on what's important for your thesis topic. Use your editorial judgment to decide which articles and ideas matter for your thesis and concentrate on them. That editorial process—your decision whether to write something down and, if so, how to summarize it in your own words—is the crux of taking good notes. Jot down key ideas, facts, and quotes that bear directly on your thesis; exclude the rest.

Tip: Take notes that focus on ideas and data relevant to your thesis. Omit the rest.

Another major part of taking notes is deciding which articles (and which parts of articles) bear on your thesis topic. Some are essential, others completely irrelevant. That means you should mull over what you are reading, decide what is germane to your thesis, and choose what is most important to include in your notes. You will return to these notes later, as you write, so you want to be sure they include the main ideas and facts you need.

Think as you read, and think as you transform your reading into notes. Ask yourself whether a particular point is significant to your thesis—not to the author's thesis but to yours. Write it down only if it contains important information and bears directly on your topic. Students waste time writing down marginal information that has little impact on their thesis. Their hands get tired because their minds are resting.

You should pause several times as you read and take notes. In the midst of an article, look away and see if you can explain to yourself what the main

point is, why it is important, and how the author supports it. Most articles have only one main point, not more. A good test of whether you truly understand the article is to see whether you can restate that point. Beyond that, ask yourself questions about what the article means and see if you can answer them. Ask what kind of evidence or logic it uses. Then make sure your insights are reflected in your notes.

After this summary of your reading, you should do two more things. First, give your own candid assessment of the author's claims and evidence. Second, as you think over the article and your notes, see if it prompts any original ideas of your own. If it does, write them down immediately and put them in brackets to identify them as yours.

Tip: Your notes on books, articles, and other readings should

- State the main point (or claim) of the article
- List any significant secondary points
- Highlight the evidence or logic used to support these points
- Offer your own (brief) critical assessment of the reading
- Include any ideas that the article suggests for your thesis

DON'T FILE 'EM AND FORGET 'EM

The notes you have just created are too valuable to be filed away, unseen for weeks. Often, your most valuable ideas about a day's readings come the next day, as you review your notes. (That's true of your draft writing, too, which should also be reviewed first thing the next day.) *Read yesterday's notes before beginning another day's reading and research.* Make it a routine, and do it with all your writing, from notes to drafts. It won't take long—probably ten or fifteen minutes—and it's incredibly productive. It will reinforce major points, suggest ideas, point you toward new readings, and get you back into the flow of your work.

Tip: Reread yesterday's notes and writing before beginning today's work.

If you don't review the materials you have studied, your retention will fall off rapidly. That means some of the time you spent reading was wasted. You can retrieve that time simply by reviewing your notes.

Reviewing your notes and writing should be an active process, not a passive one. Read your work critically and add comments or summary statements. I sometimes add “NB” to the margins of my notes or amplify a point I left undeveloped. If my notes are unclear to me, I go back and fix them or reread part of the article. I flag questions and try to repeat the author’s main points. I look for connections between this reading and others I have done. If I find such connections, I mention them in the notes. It is at least a small step toward the synthesis of readings I am aiming for. Most important of all, I look for any new ideas of my own stimulated by this review, and I write them down immediately, usually in the same file as the notes. As you know, I put my own comments in brackets and label them with my initials.

Tip: Reviewing your notes should be an active process. Engage the ideas.

BACKING UP YOUR FILES

Your notes and reading list are too valuable to leave unguarded, where they can be stolen, misplaced, or lost in a computer crash. Copy all your computer files and physical notes at regular intervals and store them in a safe place. Their loss would be devastating, and you can prevent it easily.

You’ve heard it a million times before: Back up your data. You can now make that a million and one. The horror stories of computer crashes, theft, and fire are not urban legends. They are rare, but they do happen. Fortunately, you can guard against them with little cost or effort. All you have to do is remind yourself.

The most convenient way to back up your data is on the school server. It may even be possible to do that automatically each day, a perfectly painless way to handle the problem. Check with your local geek.

Tip: Back up your data. The best arrangement saves your computer data regularly and automatically stores it at a separate location. Be sure to back up your handwritten materials, too.

Everything else is a little less convenient, but still well worth doing. The most obvious is to back up your files on a disk and store it in a separate lo-

cation. Or you could e-mail the files to a friend or even to yourself, simply for storage. You can probably figure out several other options. Start by making a simple plan now. Then start backing up your files regularly, before the computer gremlins strike.

Different gremlins could strike your handwritten notes. Nobody wants to steal your spiral notebooks or thesis outline, but they might grab your backpack or you might misplace it. Photocopy your notes occasionally and do exactly what you do with computer files: store them in a separate place, just in case. It’s cheap insurance.

We’ll talk more about your notes and other useful nuts-and-bolts ideas later—this is a practical guide, after all—but the last two chapters covered the main points that you need to get started. Now that you’ve done some reading and begun taking good notes, it’s time to meet with your adviser again, refine the thesis topic, and hand in a proposal. That’s where we’ll turn next.

CHECKLIST: READING AND TAKING NOTES

- Assemble a working bibliography and keep adding to it.
- Read important works intensively; skim others.
- Take Q-notes on readings.
- Develop your own ideas as you read and file them in your thesis ideas file.
- Back up your notes and other data.

CHECKLIST: INFORMATION NEEDED FOR CITATIONS

- Author or editor (and translator)
 - Title of book, article, or chapter in an edited book
 - Book publisher’s name, location, and date of publication
 - Edition number of book, such as 3rd ed.
 - Date of original publication for reprinted books, such as 1776
 - Journal’s name, volume number, and date
 - Pages of article, book chapter, or relevant part of a book
 - Web page address and the date you accessed it
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