

# Taking Notes

---

One of the most frustrating parts of research is half remembering something that you want to use in your report but not being 100% sure of it. In responsible research, it is NOT O.K. to "just know" or "just remember" something you've learned and include it in your project. You must capture your facts and information in notes and record where the information came from. Someone should be able to ask you, "How do you know that?" and you should be able to share where you learned that piece of information.

But how do you know what to write down? Using a highlighter as you read can be helpful, as can using **text codes**. (Obviously, make a copy before you highlight anything in a borrowed book and print out web pages to make them easier to read). Here are some tips on highlighting:

- Look carefully at the first and last lines of paragraphs.
- Highlight only necessary words and phrases
- Don't get thrown off by interesting details
- Try not to highlight more than half of a paragraph

You are looking for short bits of information, not lots of bits tied together. When you record a fact it will rarely be more than two lines long. If it seems like it will take more than that, chances are it is two facts (or more!).

When you find a single, important fact, you can record it using several different methods. (Don't forget to use quotation marks if you are using the exact words that are printed in the resource):

- **Colored Index Cards** - This is the method you used for your fourth grade project. Assign a specific color to each of your questions of wonder. Keep a master list of sources and assign a number to each one. When you find a bit of information that will help you (or might help you) answer a question, write down that bit (in your own words) on the correct color of index card and put the number of the source in the upper right hand corner.
  - Benefits: easy to organize information in different orders for writing/presenting. Easy to see which questions still need more research (fewest colored cards)
  - Drawbacks: Takes organization to not lose cards. You can end up with a giant number of cards.
- **Index Card Paper** - Write your question of wonder on the "topic" line and record any information you find about that topic on the cards printed on the paper. Record your sources as you did above.
  - Benefits: easier to keep track of all of your information.
  - Drawbacks: harder to rearrange information as you plan your writing and project.

- **Notebook** - Use a favorite notebook to record information as you find it. There are two ways to organize your notes. You can write the name of the resource at the top of the page and record useful information you find in that resource. When you go to write, you go through your notes with different colored highlighters to code information about each of your questions. You can also write questions at the top of each page and record information about each question, being careful to note the resources you use.
  - Benefits: Keeps all your notes in one place. You can use a web format if that works best for you.
  - Drawbacks: Tempting to write long notes, not just single facts. Hard to rearrange information to write.
  
- **Two Column Notes** - Use a page per question. As you take notes, have subtopics on the left hand side and details in bullet points on the right hand side.
  - Benefits: Easy to organize your information as you gather it.
  - Drawbacks: Can be difficult to figure out what your "subtopics" are.