Essay/Thesis Note Taking System

Writing is a process and it is good to have a strong system in place to help you when you get stuck. Also, plagiarism is often a symptom of not taking notes as you read or taking incomplete notes. Here is a great process that works really well not only for taking notes, but allows you to organize your thoughts into a working outline. All you need is a stack of note cards (or post-it notes) and a pencil. If you would like to be sustainable, you can order dry erase reusable notecards.

Step 1:
Find your possible sources
- Make sure and build your bibliography as you research! Even if you aren't 100% sure you will use a resource, add it to your bibliography when you find it. Chances are that if it caught your eye, you may use it. Also, it is easier to remove an item from your bibliography than to have to find the citation information at the last minute.
  - o If you prefer to keep your citations and notes electronically, try Zotero.org, a free research tool that collects, organizes, cites, and creates bibliographic resources.

Step 2
Assign a letter and number to your source to use as shorthand for the item while you take notes
- Make a note in your bibliography or on a separate piece of paper to keep track for your citations if you use notes from that item
- I usually use the letter A for articles, B for books, N for newspapers, etc. Then I number each article starting with 1 and so on
  - o Ex. Whitcomb, Ian, and Ronny S. Schiff. *Ukulele Heroes: The Golden Age*. Montclair, NJ: Hal Leonard Books, 2012.

    (This is a book and I labeled it B1)

Step 3
Start reading through your sources and make notes on your notecards. Include the letter and number you assigned to the item and the page numbers at the top of your notecard
- Only put 1 quote or note on each notecard! If it is a direct quote, make sure to put quotation marks around it to remind you that it is not paraphrased.
- Try to fit the initial note on one side of the card so you have the back of the card to paraphrase.
  - o If the quote or note is long, you can shorten it by writing the first sentence of the quote, then "…" and the last sentence of the quote. This means you will have to go back to the resource to get the entire quote when you need it.

Step 4
Use the back side of each notecard to paraphrase a direct quote or idea OR to jot down WHY you think this note is important to your research
- You can also write down any questions that come to mind as you are reading your note. This can help you later if you have writer's block or get off-track because your notes will remind you why you stopped to write down the information in your own words.

Helpful Hint- You can use the cards as a movable outline!

SAMPLE OF NOTECARD

Here is a sample of what a notecard may look like using this note taking system:

FRONT

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John Reith (a Scotch Calvinist) created a "Dance Music Policy Committee" to rate popular music discs for British radio.

EX- George Formby's "With My Little Ukulele in My Hand" was withdrawn for consideration by Decca in 1933 and made him make a clean version for broadcast

[NOTE: I paraphrased the information listed above, but noted when I was pulling a full phrase from the book (Dance Music Policy Committee) by putting that in quotes. I also included a direct example given in the book, so I will need to make sure and cite that the research was the author's, if I use the example.]

BACK

Rating systems affected radio airplay and possibly a musician's livelihood

Did the rater's personal life or religious beliefs influence their judgment?

[Note: The top statement was an additional paraphrase that synthesized the content from the front of the card. The question is something I thought I may want to look into for further research, also based on the card front content.]