

How to take notes

Step #1 - You first need to find an appropriate source. Photocopy the pages so that you can highlight and make notes in the margins. Read your source carefully before you decide what to actually write down.

Step #2 - Then you need to make a bibliography card for your source. Be sure to follow the examples from your handouts exactly.

Step #3 - Now you need to decide *what* you are going to take down on one of your note cards. Basically, you write down each new fact or idea on a new note card. If you take the information down word for word, you must use quotation marks. However, if you do not plan on using the source's exact words in your paper, then you must paraphrase. Paraphrasing means both the words and the sentence structure are yours, not copied.

Step #4 - Get a new note card and put the source number in the upper right hand corner. That is the only information necessary to identify where the note came from. Then later you will label the note card on the top line with a "topic heading", sometimes called a "slug". These few words tell you which of your subtopics this card is about. You will find your subtopics on your projected outline that you had approved. Be sure to note the page number(s) where your information was found.

Bibliography Card:

Johnson, Claudia Durst	1
<i>Understanding Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents</i>	
Greenwood Press, Westport, 1996	
Questia Media America	

Now, let's say we like the quote that begins the book's introduction. We think the idea that the novel is controversial is interesting. It doesn't, however, fit into any of our three/four subtopics. We think that we might want to use it in our introductory paragraph. A direct quote note card might look like this:

Introduction	1
page xi	
"Even by the standards of the late twentieth century, <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> is one of the most radical and darkly bitter books in the American canon."	

You use a direct quote card when you like the way a portion of the original is phrased. In fact, you don't think you could say it better yourself so that's when you'll quote it exactly as the author has stated it. However, you should just summarize information whenever you can. It saves you time and effort writing. Use your own words to interpret the ideas you're reading. You'll be less likely to overquote in your paper if you learn to summarize and paraphrase now. Look how these two note cards are set up and how they differ:

Partial quote card:

Nature	1
page 56	
Protestants thought of nature as "brutal and cruel, an element to be overcome" but Transcendentalists thought "society destroyed innocence, corrupted human beings, and fostered delusions."	

Paraphrase card:

Nature	1
page 56	
The philosophy reflected in <u>Huck Finn</u> is transcendentalism.	
God is in nature.	
Natural people are admired.	
Huck and Jim - natural characters - are the heroes.	

Introduction

The Concord (Mass.) Public Library committee has decided to exclude Mark Twain's latest book from the library. One member of the committee says that, while he does not wish to call it immoral, he thinks it contains but little humor, and that of a very coarse type. He regards it as the veriest trash. The librarian and the other members of the committee entertain similar views, characterizing it as rough, coarse and inelegant, dealing with a series of experiences not elevating, the whole book being more suited to the slums than to intelligent, respectable people. (*Boston Transcript*, March 17, 1885)

The Concord Public Library was not the only group to condemn Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This novel about the adventures of a fourteen-year-old boy has generated controversy in every year since it was published in 1884. "What!" the newcomer to the novel might exclaim--"this popular boy's book about a happy and wholesome young life in rural America?" Yet, ironically, it is true. **Even by the standards of the late twentieth century, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is one of the most radical and darkly bitter books in the American canon.** What does it present as good and worthy? For one thing, it represents the breaking of a federal law as moral. It recommends disobedience and defi-

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Huck, a young boy far from civilization and even free of clothes, very simply communes with and celebrates unspoiled nature with the slave Jim, also a natural, as opposed to a civilized, man. And indeed, the most important American philosophers in the nineteenth century, the Transcendentalists, were unlike their Protestant forebears in finding nature and what was natural to be not brutal and cruel, an element to be overcome, but basically good. They believed that society destroyed innocence, corrupted human beings, and fostered delusions. But, they argued, people could find religious truth in nature without the help of civilization. God spoke to mankind, they thought, not so much through the church and scripture as through nature. Those who were closest to nature-children and peoples who were regarded as uncivilized--were most deserving of our admiration (at least in literature and other art forms). So, on the stage, the Native American or American Indian was frequently shown as more heroic than the European, and in such popular works as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the simple black man and the little child were revered. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, with Huck and Jim as its heroes, is obviously in that philosophical tradition.

REFORMERS

And after supper he talked to him about temperance and such things till the old man cried, and said he'd been a fool, and fooled away his life, but now he was agoing to turn over a new leaf and be a man nobody wouldn't be ashamed of. (30)

When Pap shows up in Chapter 5 to claim Huck and the money Huck has found and entrusted to Judge Thatcher, he has to go to court to get custody of Huck. The new judge in town and his wife are illustrative of another typical movement in nineteenth-century culture--social reform. In this instance, the judge and his wife are members of a temperance league and set out to convert Pap to a life of abstinence from alcohol. Pap signs a pledge that he won't drink again and, as a result, they tearfully give him great praise, new clothes, a fine meal, and a roof over his head. The good temperance couple is made to look foolish, however, when Pap sneaks out of their house, trades his new coat for whiskey, goes back to

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