

HEURISTIC FOR TAKING NOTES FOR A RESEARCH PROJECT*

ENG 500 RESEARCH METHODS FALL 2008

We never think entirely alone: we think in company, in a vast collaboration; we work with the workers of the past and of the present.

--A. G. Sertillanges *The Intellectual Life* (145)

The concept of text partners . . . enables students to identify specific written works that they hope to directly engage with their writing. . . . They can then imagine these personified texts involved in a conversation and imagine themselves participating in that conversation, listening politely, connecting with points already made, and identifying three or more points that would interest the chosen partners.

--Irene L. Clark "Entering the Conversation" (147)

The following heuristic is meant to help you develop a systematic strategy for taking notes as you read scholarly publications. A systematic approach aids you in studying and writing, saving you lots of time and headaches down the road. Consider using large note cards (5X8) or the same size and kind of paper for recording notes so that these can be easily stored together and referred to. As you read, you'll encounter variation—competing, conflicting, resonating, extending—in claims and findings across the sources you read. Your notes should be consistent and detailed enough to help you see and describes differences and similarities across sources. When you record direct quotations, be sure to include the page number and to double check quotes for accuracy; this step will save you considerable time later. Below is one systematic way to record notes. You may along the way develop your own system. Although there isn't one right way to take notes, consistency is the key.

- I. Full citation (include author(s)'s full name, full title of piece, publication information, etc.)
- II. The research problem or question(s) addressed is:
- III. The thesis of this article/chapter/book is:
- IV. Key Term(s) is/are defined as: (quote the definition)
- V. The most interesting ideas in this article are:
- VI. Why do I find these ideas interesting?
- VII. What aspects of the topic does this piece overlook or distort?
- VIII. If I were to write to the author of this piece, I might say:
- IX. A potential use of this article for my project is:

If you have determined sub-topic areas for your project, you might list the relevant sub-topic that the piece addresses in the top right-hand corner. In this way you can organize your note cards together. Some people even color code their cards according to a classification scheme.

* Adapted from Irene L Clark, "Entering the Conversation: Graduate Thesis Proposals as Genre." *Professions 2005*. New York: MLA, 2005.