Getting the Most from Your Notes

You can take notes in many ways. Some people take notes by hand on index cards or sticky notes. Others record notes in a journal or notebook. Index cards and sticky notes have the advantage of being easier to organize before you begin writing.

You can use a word processing application to take notes. Specialized computer programs also help with taking notes. Electronic notes have the advantage of being easy to organize before you begin writing. They have the added advantage of being quick and easy to search.

You should find a method of note-taking that works for you. However you take your notes, some guidelines will help make sure your notes are effective:

- Always record the source for each note, including page number or Web address, when you take the note. Do not assume that you will be able to remember or find the source later.

- Always use quotation marks when you copy another author's exact words. You may accidentally plagiarize the source if you forget to include quotation marks.

- Always take time to make sure you have adequately paraphrased or summarized a source. Do not be tempted to wait until later to revise a paraphrase or summary. You may accidentally plagiarize the source when you write create your presentation.

- You may quote short phrases or sentences as part of a paraphrase or summary. This can be useful when you have trouble finding other words for a specific thought or piece of information. Make sure you use quotation marks around the phrases or sentences you copy.

- If you use a word processing application, you can find or create a form for taking notes. A form can help you remember to include a full citation for each source. It can also help you take better notes. For example, you can copy and paste information from the source into one part of the form and paraphrases its ideas in a separate section. You could summarize the source in another section of the form.