

RESEARCH NOTES

There are two firm & fast rules for writing research notes:

1. Research notes **must not** exceed two pages.
2. Research notes **must always** be written in your own words.
No cutting & pasting!!!

*"Ideas do not exist until
they have been
incorporated into words."
--Northrop Frye*

Why? Because research notes have two functions. First, they help you build a database of "artificial memory," or a set of notes to which you can refer later, rather than having to re-read all of your research. Second, and perhaps most important, the process of writing research notes will help you better understand what you are reading. Often we think we understand a text, concept, or study until pressed to put it into our own words. Suddenly, the theory we thought we knew so well escapes our comprehension. Writing research notes *in your own words* will help you check your comprehension of a reading. Furthermore, keeping your research notes within a two-page limit (you may even limit them to one page) will give you the opportunity to practice the art of summary. Being able to summarize a reading effectively is an important skill: it shows that you can read a text with an eye to its key parts and concepts, and, moreover, that you have a firm grasp of its main points.

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR RESEARCH NOTES

You may include the following:

- The main proofs used by the author to support her/his/their argument
- Definitions of key terms
- The results/conclusions drawn by the author
- Your response to the reading.

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER...

- **Bibliographic Entry:** At the top of each set of research notes, record a bibliographic entry of the source according to the guidelines of your discipline (i.e., MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.).
- **Purpose or Argument:** Articulate the main or key point of the reading, usually in approximately 250 words.
- **Type of Study or Theoretical Framework:** For example, is it a randomized controlled trial; is it a longitudinal study; a Delphi study; a meta-analysis? Or, is the theoretical framework postcolonialism, gender studies, cognitive theory of learning, etc? A few words or a sentence usually suffices here.
- **Methodology:** Briefly describe how the study was conducted, or how research for an article was conducted. You might also add to this section a quick run-down of key proofs or points from the reading.

ACADEMIC

- **Results/Conclusions:** Summarize the result and/or conclusions made by the author; this includes any limitations the author has addressed.
- **Critical Evaluation:** This is the section where you get to record your own thoughts and personal reactions to the text, so feel free to use whatever language you like in this section. You have the opportunity to be critical here—to question and criticize the author or the study. However, you should also note parts of the reading that you reacted positively to. Personal responses to a reading are important; they often form the seeds for your own research paper or study.

REFERENCES

University of Toronto (n.d.). *Taking notes from research reading*. Retrieved from <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/images/stories/Documents/notes-from-research.pdf>