

Three Column Note Taking

What is three column note taking?

Three column note taking is a helpful way to record ideas as you discover them, and to make connections with your previous knowledge and current learning. You can use this note taking method to increase your understanding and put the ideas from books, journal articles or lectures into your own words.

How will this method help me?

Three column note taking is an interesting way to enhance your active learning. When taking notes, it is very easy to become focused on recording information without thinking about why it is important. Three column note taking gives a clear structure for both recording information and thinking deeply about it as you complete each step.

First, you write down the thought or idea from your reading.

Then, you paraphrase the idea, writing it in your own words. Paraphrasing forces you to check if you understand the material clearly, and moves you towards stronger understanding. Paraphrasing is also a useful pre-writing step for papers, reports, or essay exams.

Finally, you analyze the concept and relate it to other ideas.

How do I do it?

1. Rotate your paper to landscape mode.
2. Write your source at the top of the page.
3. Divide the rest of the paper into three even columns.
4. Write down the thought or idea in the first column. You also record the page number here.
5. In the middle column, you paraphrase the thought or idea.
6. In the third column, record why the idea interests you and what it is related to. Begin the process of analyzing the thought or idea.
7. Discuss with a tutor or study partner.

When can I use this method?

Three column note taking can be especially useful for essay exams or paper writing.

- Use it to figure out how ideas connect before preparing an essay outline and thesis.
- Use it to start thinking about an idea and then add to your understanding during a meeting with a tutor or classmate.



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Critical Reading and Writing

Resource Information: _____

Content (include page number) <i>I read...</i>	Paraphrase <i>This means...</i>	Analyze, Synthesize, Links <i>This connects to...</i>

Adapted from McMaster University (2009) Three Column Note taking. <http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity/students/typeofad/plagiarism/3ColmNote.html>

