



Reading & Taking Notes – English Transcript

In the OSLIS video, "Evaluating and Choosing Sources," we explained how to use the TRAAP method to evaluate and sort your potential sources into three piles -- Yes, Maybe, and No. Now, that you have a selection of Yes sources -- those that you determined are just right for your topic -- what do you do next? It's time to dig into the Yes pile for answers to your research questions by reading and taking notes. Taking good notes now will make writing your paper much easier later.

Before you begin, be sure to minimize distractions so you can focus. As part of the earlier steps of the research process -- determining your research questions and selecting keywords -- you already did some broad general reading to develop background knowledge about your topic. Depending on your comfort level with your topic, you may need to do even more background reading. If so, sort through your pile of sources and pick one that presents a general overview.

An encyclopedia article is often a good place to start. Another option is to read the introductory chapter of a book or an overview article from a magazine. This will help you understand the vocabulary, keywords, and ideas related to your topic. Once you have a basic knowledge of your topic, you'll change your focus from reading broadly to reading specifically. Now, you'll need to find answers to your research questions. Keep in mind that you may even want to change or add a question based on new information.

For this video, let's say our main research question is -- How do bees work together as a community? That made us wonder about the roles bees play in a hive, which led us to these supporting questions.

Start by looking at your first question -- What are the roles of the three kinds of bees that live in a hive? Let's focus on finding information about the queen.

Select any source from your Yes pile. If your source is a book, browse the table of contents and index for keywords that seem to relate to your question.

If a chapter looks promising, turn to that chapter and scan any headings, captions, or bold words. Do the same thing for an article from a magazine, newspaper, or web site.

Do any of the sections seem like they'll help answer your question? If so, jump in! You do not need to read the source from beginning to end. Instead, just read the section that you think will help answer your question:

"Some workers in the hive are in charge of caring for the most important bee- the queen. Each colony has only one. She produces chemicals called pheromones to communicate with the other bees. They smell the pheromones to find out what the queen wants them to do. For example, the queen's scent lets worker bees know when to feed, groom, and attend to her other needs. The queen is larger than the other bees because she lays lots of eggs."



Did the section help answer your question about the queen's role in the hive? Did it answer any of your other questions?

If it did, you want to remember the information, so now, it's time to take some notes. Every time you take notes from a new source, write down the details you will need to create a citation later. This includes title, author, publisher, publication date, and page numbers. For web sites, also include the URL. Doing this now will save you time later.

Now, let's start taking notes from the book. Reread the relevant section one chunk at a time, writing down the important information.

OK, you say, but what is important? Definitions, details, facts, and explanations are examples of important information, but only if they relate to your research questions.

So the next step is to write down all of the important information word for word, right? Nope! You should not copy every word. Copying another person's exact words without giving credit is called plagiarism. A good rule of thumb is do not write down more than 5 of the author's exact words in a row in your notes.

Write down single words or phrases instead of full sentences. You can even make a bulleted list to record details. Be as brief as possible but write down enough information so that your notes will make sense to you later. For example, with your topic about bees and your first question about the role of the queen, what information should you record?

"Most important be in the hive." Hmm. Interesting. I should note that. Because this is a very short phrase -- only three words -- and because this information would be difficult to explain in our own words, I know it's OK to write the same phrase used in the book -- most important bee.

What else is important? Here's a word that I don't recognize. Oh, the word is in bold, so it must be important, but what does pheromone mean? I'll read to see if the book explains it. Oh, here it is. I should write that down, too.

If I keep thinking about what information answers my questions, the rest of my notes might look something like this:

Largest bee because lays eggs, 1,500 eggs a day, Most eggs become worker bees (all females), Some become drones (all males), A few become queen bees

As you continue reading through your sources, you may find a gem, a longer phrase or a sentence or two that is stated in an especially helpful clear or interesting way.



It's OK to write it word for word even when it is more than five words long, as long as you use quotation marks. The quotation marks show that these are the author's words, and not your own. When you use a direct quote, be sure to include the page number in your notes.

For example, let's say that after you read this fact, you were wowed by how many bees make so much of what they need themselves. Since it is so interesting to you, it might make sense to quote it in your paper:

Page 19: "Bees use chemicals from their bodies to make nearly everything that they need, including wax and royal jelly."

After looking for answers to your first question in the first source, you have two choices. You can look for answers to your other questions in the same source, or you can continue looking for answers to your first question in other sources. It's up to you. For this video, we'll look for information that relates to several or all of our questions in one source before changing to a new source.

So, are there other sections that look like they might answer your questions?

If so, read and take notes one section at a time until you've recorded everything relevant in the source. You might come across some really interesting information, but if it does not answer any of your questions, you do not need to take notes on it.

Let's try to find answers for one of the other bee questions. We already found out about the queen bee's role in the hive, so let's investigate the role of the worker bee. You can either use the table of contents or index to find information about worker bees, or you can flip through the pages and scan for passages that seem to relate to them.

Consider this passage. Do you think this information would help answer your question about the role of worker bees in the hive? Yes? You got it! Now, let's read for specific details:

"Worker bees are also responsible for collecting nectar from forager bees. A forager bee spits the nectar into the mouth of a worker. Inside the worker's body, the nectar is mixed with chemicals. After 30 minutes, the worker bee spits the nectar into a cell and fans it with its wings. This helps the water from the nectar evaporate. A few hours later, the sweet liquid has turned into thick, gooey honey that's ready to eat."

So what notes would you take from this passage? Some possible notes might be...

Forager bee gathers nectar, Transfers nectar to worker bee, Worker digests nectar for half hour, Spits nectar into hive cells, Fans wings to evaporate water, Bee saliva becomes honey



Notice that the student paraphrased the original source by writing down the ideas in her own words instead of using the author's exact words.

Also, her notes are brief. She used phrases instead of complete sentences and omitted unimportant words like "the."

For example, the student read these words from the book:

"fans it with its wings. This helps the water from the nectar evaporate."

...and wrote this in her notes:

Fans wings to evaporate water.

Now it is time to take a look at your second source. Again, browse and scan to identify relevant sections, read the text in those sections one chunk at a time, and take notes on information that answers your questions. When you're done, repeat the steps using the next source.

By now, you should have read some of the same information in multiple sources. This is a good thing because it validates or confirms the information you have found. However, there is no need to take notes on repeated information unless an author provides a new twist, a better explanation, or new details.

So what do you do if you find conflicting information when one source disagrees with another source? Take a look at the two sources. Does one seem better because it is more current, or does one author seem like more of an expert than the other?

If yes, go with the information in the better source.

You can also check additional sources to see if you can verify any of the inconsistent information. Or, maybe there are multiple points of view on this issue. If that becomes clear, it would be good to point out the different viewpoints in your paper. Still confused about conflicting information? Ask your teacher or librarian for help.

As you read and take notes, regularly review your research questions. What else do you need to find out?

Use the index or the Find feature in your sources to look for the specific information you need. If you don't have any luck, it may be time to search for a new source using keywords from your unanswered question. Hopefully, you'll find a new source with just the right information. Or, you may determine that there is no known answer for one of your questions.



So how do you know when to stop researching? Stop when you have a good understanding of the topic, when you have met the assignment requirements, and when you have all of your questions answered. Even if your teacher requires a specific number of sources, you may need more than that to answer all of your questions.

Here's a final tip. There are several notetaking formats, and your teacher may ask you to follow a particular style. Whether you use note cards, a piece of paper, a graphic organizer, or a device, what is most important is the information you include in your notes. The better your notes are, the better your paper will be.

For specific examples and for more information about this topic and the entire research process, explore OSLIS. Thank you to Bearport Publishing for granting permission to use their book in this video. OSLIS -- Learn to Research. Research to Learn.