



# Lesson One: Note-taking

**Blech. Why do I have to take notes?** There are many, many reasons, and not all of them have to do with the sadistic delight that teachers take in torturing students (mwah ha ha). Here are a few of the most important:

- ❑ **The more active you are during the learning process, the more you will remember.** This is a common phenomenon: a person will make a grocery list, then accidentally leave the grocery list at home. But then, when she gets to the store, she remembers everything she is supposed to buy, just because writing it down helped cement the information in her memory. The same thing happens when you take notes over reading or lectures in history class.

When you just sit and read, or sit and listen to a lecture, you are being passive. You might remember some things, but not everything you need. Taking notes makes you active: deciding what information to write down and how to summarize it efficiently helps to cement it in your memory. Think about trying to learn the steps to a dance routine: would it be better to just sit and watch someone doing the dance, or to physically practice the steps along with the dance teacher? Actually *doing* something helps you learn better and faster. Taking notes makes you more active during the learning process.

- ❑ **Taking notes keeps you from zoning out as you read or listen.** We've all experienced this scenario: you are just going to read or listen carefully, and not take notes, because taking notes is boring and makes your hand hurt. You mean to pay attention, you *really* do, but suddenly you realize that you've passed your eyes over two whole pages and have no idea what you just read. When you're actively taking notes, that is way less likely to happen.

- ❑ **Well-organized notes make studying for quizzes and tests easier and faster.** Lots of kids will study for an AP test by re-reading the chapters it covers. That is extremely inefficient! If you take good, well-organized notes, you will be extracting the important information that you need for studying, and eschewing the extra stuff.

**Some Note-taking Styles** Taking notes is a pretty personal thing. After all, notes are for *you*. (Yeah, your teacher might check to see that you did them at some point, but the information in the notes is to help *you* learn and study.) So, unless your teacher requires a specific style, which he indubitably has good reasons for doing, you should find a note-taking style that you like and are willing to use.

- ❑ **Writing-Everything-Down Style** This involves writing down every single word the teacher or book says, word for word, and is a **terrible, terrible note-taking style**. Not only is it kind of pointless (since you're not extracting the important information), it can lead to hand injuries. I used this note-taking style in college, and now I have carpal tunnel syndrome and have to wear a hideous wrist brace to bed. True story.
- ❑ **Outline Style** This is a great style for those of us who like everything to be neatly organized into categories and levels. (Yes, there are people who take an almost sick pleasure from organizing *everything*. We love the Container Store.) When using outline style with a history text, you make each section of the book a capital Roman numeral, each sub-section a capital letter, each sub-sub-section an Arabic numeral, and then organize information below with lower-case letters. Then be sure to highlight proper nouns and vocabulary words. WHAT?!?! It's much easier to understand if you look at the example on page 3.
- ❑ **Cornell Style** This note-taking style is good for people who are a little more visual in their learning approach. It is also beneficial because it forces you to process information three times, thus increasing the likelihood that you'll remember it (resulting in less studying later). You divide your paper vertically, with kind of a skinny-ish cues column on the left, and a wide notes column on the right. At the bottom, you make a summary box.

First you take notes in the notes column, writing down only the important information. (We'll get into how to decide what's important later in the lesson.) You then put section titles, vocabulary words, people's names, names of events, questions, or pictures in the cues column. At the end, you write a 2-3 sentence summary of the big ideas in the summary box. The idea is that when you are ready to study, you can fold your notes so that you can only see the cues column, and then use it to quiz yourself. It also helps you to locate specific information more easily. Check out the example on page 4.

Cues	Notes
<b>Summary:</b>	

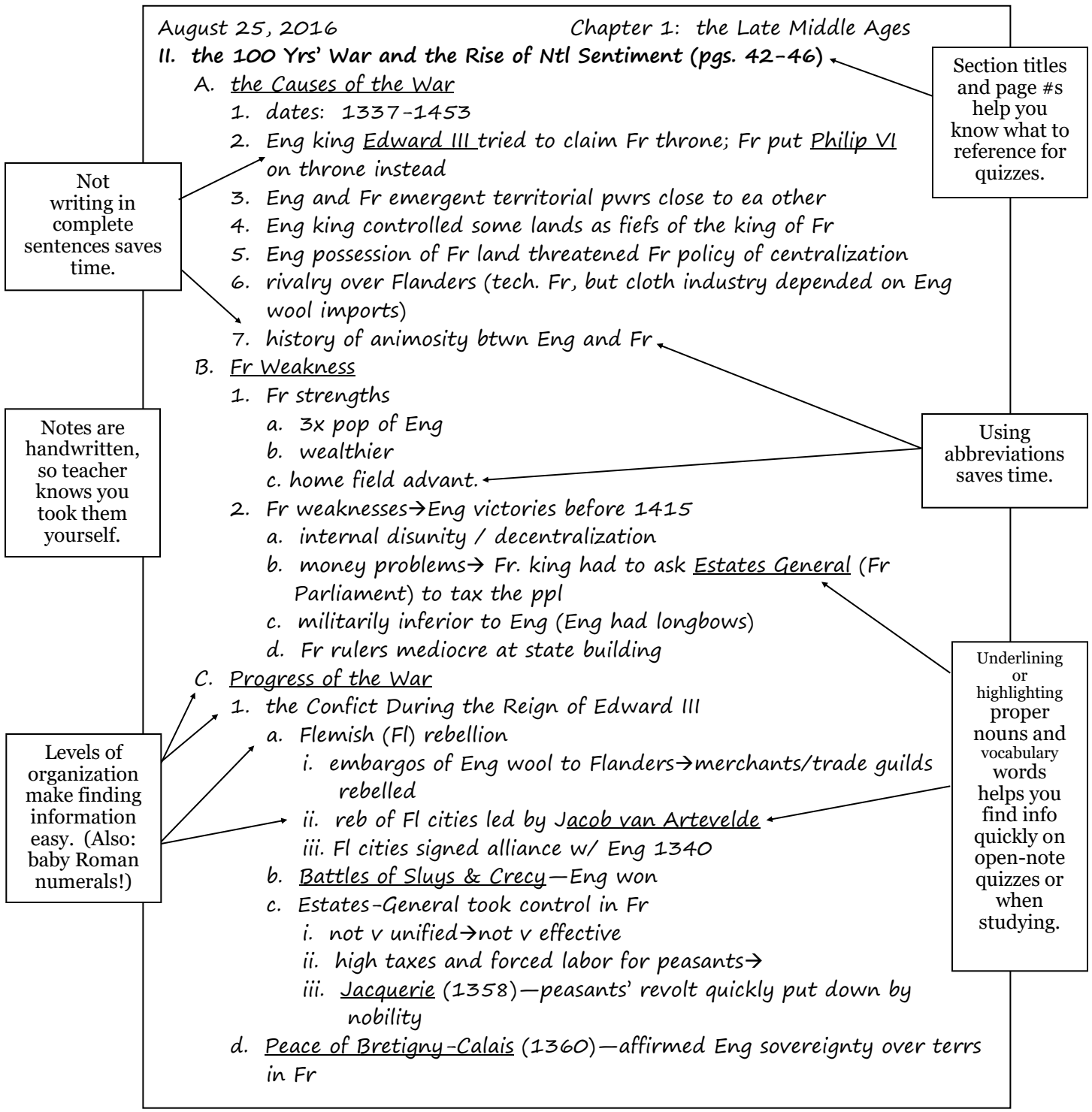
- ❑ **Bullet Style** This is the least structured note-taking style, and it makes some teachers unhappy. But notes are for you, so if this style works for you and your teacher will allow it, go for it. You *do* have to remember to build some structure in, by writing down section titles and highlighting proper nouns and vocabulary words. See the example on page 5.

# Examples of Note-taking Styles

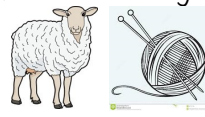

Below are notes on the same excerpt (from Chapter 1 of Kagan's *the Western Heritage* textbook) in the three different legitimate note-taking styles. (Remember, Writing-Everything-Down Style is no good, so no example is included for that.)

Some of the elements of good note-taking are pointed out on these pages. We will discuss the purposes of those elements later in the lesson.

## Outline-style Sample Notes



# Cornell-style Sample Notes

Cues	Notes Ch 1: the Late Middle Ages; August 25, 2016
Section	the 100 Yrs' War (HYW) and the Rise of Ntl Sentiment (pgs. 42-46)
<p>HYW dates</p> <p>HYW causes</p> <p>Edward III</p> <p>Philip IV</p> <p>territorial issues</p> <p>What is a fief?</p> <p>Flanders rivalry</p>  <p>Fr strengths</p> <p>Fr weaknesses</p> <p>What was the Estates-General?</p>  <p>Flemish rebellion</p> <p>Jacob van Artevelde</p> <p>Battles of Sluys &amp; Crecy</p> <p>Jacquerie</p> <p>Peace of Bretigny-Calais</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ 1337-1453</li> <li>□ causes:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eng king Edward III tried to claim Fr throne; Fr put Philip VI on throne instead</li> <li>• Eng and Fr emergent territorial pwrs close to ea other</li> <li>• Eng king controlled some lands as fiefs of the king of Fr</li> <li>• Eng possession of Fr land threatened Fr policy of centralization</li> <li>• rivalry over Flanders (tech. Fr, but cloth industry depended on Eng wool imports)</li> <li>• history of animosity btwn Eng and Fr</li> </ul> </li> <li>□ Fr strengths             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3x pop of Eng</li> <li>• wealthier</li> <li>• home field advant</li> </ul> </li> <li>□ Fr weaknesses → Eng victories before 1415             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• internal disunity / decentralization</li> <li>• money problems → Fr. king had to ask Estates General (Fr Parliament) to tax the ppl</li> <li>• militarily inferior to Eng (Eng had longbows)</li> <li>• Fr rulers mediocre at state building</li> </ul> </li> <li>□ during reign of Edward III             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• embargos of Eng wool to Flanders → merchants/trade guilds rebelled</li> <li>• reb of Flemish cities led by Jacob van Artevelde</li> <li>• Fl cities signed alliance w/ Eng 1340</li> <li>• Battles of Sluys &amp; Crecy — Eng won</li> <li>• Estates-General (E-G) took control in Fr</li> <li>• E-G not v unified → not v effective</li> <li>• high taxes and forced labor for peasants → Jacquerie (1358) — peasants' revolt quickly put down by nobility</li> <li>• Peace of Bretigny-Calais (1360) — affirmed Eng sovereignty over terrs in Fr</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Summary:</b> Territorial and dynastic issues led to the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War between France and England in the 1330s. The English prevailed in the first phase of the war, due in part to superior military technology, a more organized government, and stronger monarchs.</p>	

Using abbreviations saves time.

Pictures can help visual learners remember items better (but are not always required).

Writing proper nouns, vocabulary words, and questions in the cues column helps you find info quickly on open-note quizzes or when studying.

Section titles and page #s help you know what to reference for quizzes.

Not writing in complete sentences saves time.

Notes are handwritten, so teacher knows you took them yourself.

Summary section forces you to process information further, considering the big picture.

## Bullet-style Sample Notes

Section titles and page #s help you know what to reference for quizzes.

Ch 1: Late Middle Ages August 25, 2016  
**the Hundred Years' War (HYW) and the Rise of National Sentiment**  
(pgs. 42-46)

- ☐ dates: 1337-1453
- ☐ causes:
  - Eng king Edward III tried to claim Fr throne; Fr put Philip VI on throne instead
  - Eng and Fr emergent territorial pwrs close to ea other
  - Eng king controlled some lands as fiefs of the king of Fr
  - Eng possession of Fr land threatened Fr policy of centralization
  - rivalry over Flanders (tech. Fr, but cloth industry depended on Eng wool imports)
  - history of animosity btwn Eng and Fr
- ☐ Fr strengths
  - 3x pop of Eng
  - wealthier
  - home field advant
- ☐ Fr weaknesses → Eng victories before 1415
  - internal disunity / decentralization
  - money problems → Fr. king had to ask Estates General (Fr Parliament) to tax the ppl
  - militarily inferior to Eng (Eng had longbows)
  - Fr rulers mediocre at state building
- ☐ during reign of Edward III
  - embargos of Eng wool to Flanders → merchants/trade guilds rebelled
  - reb of Flemish cities led by Jacob van Artevelde
  - Fl cities signed alliance w/ Eng 1340
  - Battles of Sluys & Crecy — Eng won
  - Estates-General (E-G) took control in Fr
  - E-G not v unified → not v effective
  - high taxes and forced labor for peasants → Jacquerie (1358) — peasants' revolt quickly put down by nobility
  - Peace of Bretigny-Calais (1360) — affirmed Eng sovereignty over terrs in Fr

Underlining or highlighting proper nouns and vocabulary words helps you find info quickly on open-note quizzes or when studying.

Not writing in complete sentences saves time.

Notes are handwritten, so teacher knows you took them yourself.

**Note-taking Elements** No matter which of the three legitimate styles you use for note-taking, your notes should include these elements:

- ❑ **Chapter, section, and sub-section titles** Write down all the titles of chapters, sections, sub-sections, etc. The titles are in the textbook to help you locate information quickly. They can serve the same function in your notes.
- ❑ **Page numbers and dates** Write down the page numbers that each section covers. This will help if your teacher gives you a notes quiz over certain page numbers, or asks to see your notes for a certain day. This will also help you keep your notes in order.
- ❑ **Abbreviations** Work out a system of abbreviations for words you need to write down frequently. Notes are for you, so abbreviations are good *as long as you remember what they stand for later on* when you review your notes. If you find yourself using a word frequently and want to make up an abbreviation, write out the abbreviation once in the margin in case you forget later. Examples: *Eng = England; Fr = France; RS = Renaissance; RF = Reformation, etc.*
- ❑ **Succinct sentence fragments** Again, notes are for *you*, and writing everything in complete sentences takes up time and hand-strength that you don't need to waste. Why write down 'The English embargoed wool shipments to Flanders, which caused Flemish merchant and trade guilds to rebel' when 'embargos of Eng wool to Fl→ merchants/trade guilds rebelled' conveys the same information in a much more succinct way? Don't get me wrong: complete sentences have their place in history class—they just aren't necessary when taking notes.
- ❑ **Visual emphasis of proper nouns and vocabulary terms** What do teachers quiz you on the most often? People's names, the names of documents, the names of events, and vocabulary terms. You need to do something to make these stand out so you can reference them easily during an open-note quiz or study session. If you are using Outline- or Bullet-style notes, just underline or highlight the proper nouns and terms after you finish taking notes. If you are using Cornell-style notes, then make sure to write all the proper nouns and terms in the cues column in the area that corresponds to where they are in the notes section.
- ❑ **Handwritten in your handwriting** Yeah, I know. Most kids don't like to handwrite their notes. However, unfortunately, there are bajillions of ways for kids to pass other people's notes off as their own, thanks to computers / the internet. One student could easily type his notes, then make fourteen copies for friends, and it would be difficult for the teacher to know unless she compared everyone's notes every single day.


'What's wrong with that,' you might ask, 'as long as everyone has the notes?' Remember that the *act* of taking notes is what helps to cement the information in your brain, not just the fact that you have some notes in your hand. *You* need to take your own notes to get the full benefit. Requiring you to take notes in your own handwriting just helps give the teacher a little more assurance that you took the notes yourself. There's also some recent educational research that shows that handwriting information helps your brain process it better than typing it does.

**What to write down** Probably the most common problem students have when taking notes is that they don't know what is important and what's not important, so either write down way too much or way too little. How can you tell what's important?

❑ **Use features of the textbook that help you determine what's important.** Depending on your textbook, these could include:


- **Focus questions** Check the beginning of the chapter for focus questions, then be sure you have written down all the information that is pertinent to the questions.
- **Section and sub-section titles** If you've just read a section entitled 'the Conquest of the Aztecs,' but haven't written down who conquered them, how they were conquered, when they were conquered, etc., then chances are you missed something.
- **Bolded, colored, or visually emphasized terms and names** Some textbooks will put visual emphasis on the names of important people, vocabulary words, themes, etc.
- **Section and chapter reviews** Many books have review boxes at the end of each section or review pages at the end of each chapter that list key terms, names, events, documents, and themes.

**Medieval Church Architecture**  
**Romanesque cathedrals** were the earlier cathedrals. Many of the old Roman engineering techniques had been lost, so architects weren't able to do a whole lot of exciting stuff. Romanesque cathedrals had very thick walls and small, rounded windows (because if the windows were too large, the walls would collapse).



a Romanesque cathedral

**Gothic cathedrals** were built later in the Middle Ages. Architects had figured out how to enlarge the windows without collapsing the walls. They did this by using **flying buttresses**, which were supports that came out from the side of the wall to help hold up the weight. (They looked sort of like insect legs.) These cathedrals tended to have lots of pointy parts—pointed windows, arches, and spires.



a Gothic cathedral

Cathedrals in the Gothic style also featured stained glass windows, which helped to teach the illiterate about Bible stories. Additionally, the exteriors featured gargoyles (this word comes from a French word which means 'throat' or 'spout!'). These were statues carved into the shapes of grotesque, fantastical monsters which had spouts for draining water from the walls.

3.7 72

sample of bolded words in a textbook

was eliminated, however, and in the end most of the rebels were pardoned.

**Revolts in the Cities** Revolts also erupted in the cities. Commercial and industrial activity suffered almost immediately from the Black Death. An oversupply of goods and an immediate drop in demand led to a decline in trade after 1350. Some industries suffered greatly. Florence's woolen industry, one of the giants, produced 70,000 to 80,000 pieces of cloth in 1338; in 1378, it was yielding only 24,000 pieces. Bourgeois merchants and manufacturers responded to the decline in trade and production by attempting to restrict competition and resist the demands of the lower classes.

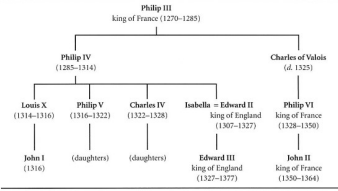
In urban areas, where capitalist industrialists paid low wages and managed to prevent workers from forming organizations to help themselves, industrial revolts broke out throughout Europe. Ghent experienced one in 1380. Rouen in 1382. Most famous, however, was the revolt of the *ciompi* in Florence in 1378. The *ciompi* were wool workers in Florence's most prominent industry. In the 1370s, not only was the woolen industry depressed, but the wool workers saw their real wages decline when the coinage in which they were paid was debased. Their revolt won them some concessions from the municipal government, including the right to form guilds and be represented in the government. But their newly won rights were short-lived; authorities ended *ciompi* participation in the government by 1382. Although the peasant and urban revolts sometimes resulted in short-term gains for the participants, it is also true that the uprisings were quickly crushed and their gains lost. Accustomed to ruling, the established classes easily combined and quashed dissent. Nevertheless, the rural and urban revolts of the fourteenth century ushered in an age of social conflict that characterized much of later European history.

**War and Political Instability**

❑ **Focus Question:** What major problems did European states face in the fourteenth century?

Famine, plague, economic turmoil, social upheaval, and violence were not the only problems of the fourteenth century. War and political instability must also be added to the list. Of all the struggles that ensued in the fourteenth century, the Hundred Years' War was the most famous and the most violent.

**CHART 11.1 Background to the Hundred Years' War: Kings of France and England**



**Causes of the Hundred Years' War**

In 1259, the English king, Henry III, had relinquished his claims to all the French territories previously held by the English monarchy except for one relatively small possession known as the duchy of Gascony. As duke of Gascony, the English king pledged loyalty as a vassal to the French king. But this territory gave rise to numerous disputes between the kings of England and France. By the thirteenth century, the Capetian monarchs had greatly increased their power over their more important vassals, the great lords of France. Royal officials interfered regularly in the affairs of the vassals' fiefs, especially in matters of justice. Although this policy irritated all the vassals, it especially annoyed the king of England, who considered himself the peer of the French king.

A dispute over the right of succession to the French throne also complicated the struggle between the French and the English. In the fourteenth century, the Capetian dynasty failed to produce a male heir for the first time in almost four hundred years. In 1296, the last son of King Philip IV died without a male heir. The closest male relative in line to the throne was King Edward III of England (1272-1377), whose mother was Isabella, the daughter of Philip IV (see Chart 11.1). Known for her strong personality (she was nicknamed the "she-wolf of France"), Isabella, with the assistance of her lover, led a revolt against her husband, King Edward II, overthrew him, and ruled England until her teenage son, Edward III, took sole control of the throne in 1330. As the son of the daughter of King Philip IV, King Edward III of England had a claim to the French throne, but the French nobles argued that the inheritance of the monarchy could not pass through the female line and chose a cousin of the Capetians, Philip, duke of Valois, as King Philip VI (1328-1350).

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sample of focus questions in a textbook

❑ **Pay attention to things that are usually important in history class.**

- **Proper nouns and vocabulary terms** People's names, event names, document titles, and vocabulary words are always on history quizzes.
- **Cause and effect** Any time your book lists the causes or effects of something, write them down.
- **Dates** Even if your teacher doesn't ask about specific dates, it's helpful to write them down to help keep events in sequence. (Textbooks are often not written in *exact* chronological order; sometimes they are thematic.)

**Note-taking Technique** Use this step-by-step technique to take notes efficiently and be sure you have the important information down.

- ❑ **Figure out where you will keep notes and how you will organize them.** Do this before you even open the textbook! Things are much more likely to stay in order if you have an organization system set up in advance.

If you are using a spiral, then be sure to have a spiral just for history notes, or get a spiral that has dividers and use one section specifically for history notes.

If you are taking notes on loose paper, then you need to have a specific folder, binder, or binder section that is exclusively for history notes. Force yourself to put the most recent set of notes in the back so that they stay in chronological order.

- ❑ **Write the date at the top of your paper.**
- ❑ **When you start a new chapter, write down the chapter number and title.**
- ❑ **When you start a new section, write down the section name and page numbers. Write down the names of sub-sections too, if your textbook includes them.**
- ❑ **Read one paragraph, then summarize in one sentence.** If you are having trouble determining the main idea, re-read the first and last sentence of the paragraph. The main idea is usually mentioned there.
- ❑ **After summarizing the main idea, go back and write down specific important info for that paragraph.** See pages 7-8 for clues on what is important to write down.
- ❑ **Move on to the next paragraph and repeat until notes are finished.**
- ❑ **Visually emphasize proper nouns and vocabulary words.** If you are using Outline- or Bullet-style notes, use a highlighter on ‘quizzable items.’ If you are using Cornell-style notes, then make sure these items are written in the cues column in a spot that corresponds to where the items are explained in your notes.
- ❑ **Verify that you have all the info you need.** Use focus questions at the beginning of the chapter, a section or chapter review in the textbook, or the syllabus or outline your teacher has given you to make sure that you have written down everything for which you will be responsible.
- ❑ **Save your notes (and other papers from AP European History) until the end of the year!** You don’t have to carry them around with you every day once you’ve taken the unit test, but stash your notes, daily work, quizzes, and test reviews somewhere safe and easily accessible at home (maybe in a drawer in your desk or on a shelf in your closet). Keep it all in order by unit, and when it comes time to prepare for final exams and the AP test, you’ll have a great resource.



## What to write down (continued)

### □ Pay attention to ‘author clues’ about significant events, people, documents or themes.

- Amount of space devoted to an item If the author writes four paragraphs about Ben Franklin, listing numerous specific accomplishments and explaining them in detail, then Ben Franklin is probably important. Conversely, if there is one really vague sentence about the combined contributions of Obscureface McGee and Archibald What’s-his-face, then they are probably not important.

Side note about ‘biographical interest’ info: Textbook authors will often include some biographical information about significant historical figures. They might say where the person was born, what kind of personality he had, where he went to school, whether he wrassled with a bear as a small child, that stuffed animals were named after him, etc. This is designed to get you interested in the person or help you see him as a real human being, but is rarely of historical significance, so you usually don’t need to write that stuff down.

- Lists If the author makes an overt or implied list of causes, characteristics, reasons for significance, effects, etc., then you should write the listed items down.

An overt list will come right out and draw attention to the fact that items are being listed, often with words like ‘first, second, third’ or ‘primarily, secondarily, finally.’ Example: *The first major event that contributed to the decline of feudalism was the Crusades, which stimulated trade, undermining manorialism, the economic system that accompanied feudalism. The second major event was the Black Death or Bubonic Plague, which led to social chaos and created a labor shortage that essentially nullified the strict social hierarchy that characterized feudalism. The last major event was the Hundred Years’ War, which made feudal warfare obsolete and led to the rise of nationalism and increased centralization in Britain and France—the exact opposite of the decentralized political structure present in feudalism.*

An implied list will not come right out and scream, ‘Hey, lookee here, a LIST!’ but you can still tell from the way the text is written. Example: *Characteristics of Gothic cathedrals included pointed arches, flying buttresses, stained glass, and gargoyles.*

- Explanations of significance Usually an author will spend a little time telling you the details of an event or an idea, and then will follow up with an explanation of why the event was important. How much attention you need to devote to the details varies according to your teacher’s style—some teachers prefer you to know ‘big-picture’ information, and others like you to know very specific factual information. Once you get to know your teacher’s style, you can determine how much information you need to write down about the specific details of an event or philosophy.

Regardless of your teacher’s style, though, historical significance is always important. Textbooks will sometimes be overt about significance, saying something like, *This event was important because...* Other times significance will be implied.