

MOD Writing System

Writing and Skills Handbook

for AP European History



by Carrie Floyd Cagle



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Lesson One: Notetaking

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
Summary:	

- 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

August 25, 2015

Chapter 1: the Late Middle Ages

II. the 100 Yrs' War and the Rise of Ntl Sentiment (pgs. 42-46)

A. the Causes of the War

1. dates: 1337-1453
2. Eng king Edward III tried to claim Fr throne; Fr put Philip VI on throne instead
3. Eng and Fr emergent territorial pwrs close to ea other
4. Eng king controlled some lands as fiefs of the king of Fr
5. Eng possession of Fr land threatened Fr policy of centralization
6. rivalry over Flanders (tech. Fr, but cloth industry depended on Eng wool imports)
7. history of animosity btwn Eng and Fr

B. Fr Weakness

1. Fr strengths
 - a. 3x pop of Eng
 - b. wealthier
 - c. home field advant.
2. Fr weaknesses → Eng victories before 1415
 - a. internal disunity / decentralization
 - b. money problems → Fr. king had to ask Estates General (Fr Parliament) to tax the ppl
 - c. militarily inferior to Eng (Eng had longbows)
 - d. Fr rulers mediocre at state building

C. Progress of the War

1. the Conflict During the Reign of Edward III
 - a. Flemish (Fl) rebellion
 - i. embargos of Eng wool to Flanders → merchants/trade guilds rebelled
 - ii. reb of Fl cities led by Jacob van Artevelde
 - iii. Fl cities signed alliance w/ Eng 1340
 - b. Battles of Sluys & Crecy — Eng won
 - c. Estates-General took control in Fr
 - i. not v unified → not v effective
 - ii. high taxes and forced labor for peasants →
 - iii. Jacquerie (1358) — peasants' revolt quickly put down by nobility
- d. Peace of Bretigny-Calais (1360) — affirmed Eng sovereignty

Annotations and Explanations:

- section titles and page #s help you know what to reference for quizzes
- levels of organization make finding info easy
- notes are handwritten, so teacher knows you took them yourself
- using abbreviations saves time
- not writing in complete sentences saves time
- highlighting proper nouns and vocabulary words helps you find info quickly on open-note quizzes or when studying
- dates help you orient yourself chronologically

Cornell Style Sample Notes

Cues	Notes Ch 1: the Late Middle Ages; August 25, 2015
<p>section title and page #s help you know what to reference for quizzes / tests</p> <p>writing questions to look up or ask teacher during class helps clarify unfamiliar material</p> <p>writing proper nouns, vocabulary words, and thematic info in the cues column helps you find info quickly on open-note quizzes or when studying</p> <p>Summary section forces you to process information further, considering the big picture</p> <p>Section</p> <p>HYW dates HYW causes</p> <p>Edward III Philip IV territorial issues</p> <p>What is a fief?</p> <p>Flanders rivalry Where is Flanders?</p> <p>Fr strengths</p> <p>Fr weaknesses</p> <p>Estates-General</p> <p>Flemish rebellion</p> <p>Jacob van Artevelde</p> <p>Battles of Sluys & Crecy</p> <p>Jacquerie</p> <p>Peace of Bretigny-Calais</p>	<p>the 100 Yrs' War (HYW) and the Rise of Ntl Sentiment (pgs. 42-46)</p> <p>□ 1337-1453</p> <p>□ causes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 <p>□ Fr strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3x pop of Eng wealthier home field advant, <p>□ Fr weaknesses→Eng victories before 1415</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 <p>□ during reign of Edward III</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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
<p>Summary</p>	<p>Summary: 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

not writing in complete sentences saves time

dates help you orient yourself chronologically

notes are handwritten, so teacher knows you took them yourself

Bullet Style Sample Notes

Ch 1: Late Middle Ages August 25, 2015

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 pwr's 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

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

using abbreviations saves time

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

dates help you orient yourself chronologically

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

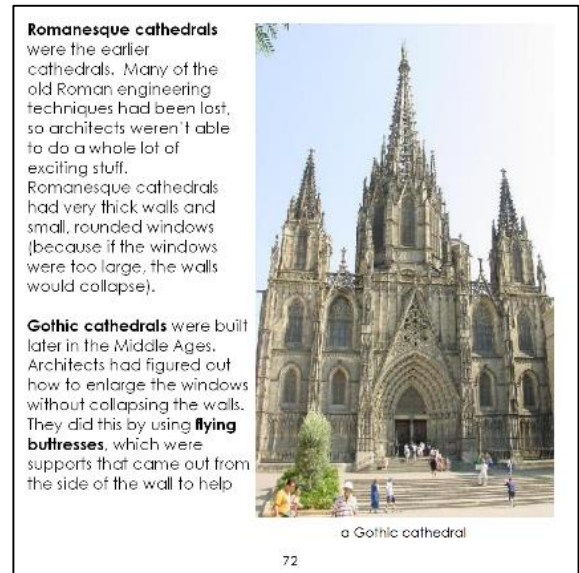
- ❑ **Chapter, section, and sub-section titles** Write down all the titles of chapters, sections, sub-sections, etc. The titles are in the textbook to help you locate information quickly. They can serve the same function in your notes.
- ❑ **Page numbers and dates** Write down the page numbers that each 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, HYW = Hundred Years' War, E6 = Edward VI, 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 **'Edward VI, an English king, claimed the French throne in 1337, starting the Hundred Years' War,'** when **'Eng king E6 cl Fr throne (1337)→HYW'** 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 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 say, '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.

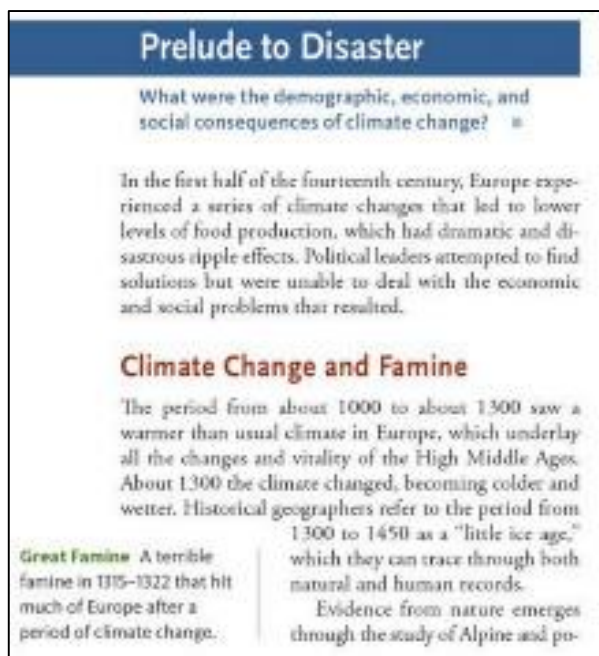
What to write down Probably the most common problem students have when taking notes is that they don't know what is important and what's not important, so either write down way too much or way too little. How can you tell what's important?

❑ **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 or each section 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 Motives for the Crusades,' but haven't written down what the Crusades were, what caused them, when they were, who was involved, 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.



sample of bolded words in a textbook



sample of a focus question 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.)

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 Petrarch, listing numerous specific accomplishments and explaining them in detail, then Petrarch 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, that he was super in love with some chick named Laura, 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: *Three major factors led to the decline of feudalism in the late Middle Ages. First were the Crusades, which stimulated trade; next was the Hundred Years’ War, which led to an increase in nationalism...*

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: *Europeans were more susceptible to the Black Death due to overpopulation, malnutrition, and the Little Ice Age.*

- 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. Attention to detail varies according to your teacher’s style—some teachers prefer you to know ‘big-picture’ information, and others like you to know more specific detail. 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.

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.

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page
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