Note Cards

1. Write your notes on 4" x 6" index cards.

2. Write on only one side of the card, unless you have just one or two lines left. If so, use the back.

3. On any one card, write notes only on one topic and from one reference source.

4. Include the following information on each card:
   - identification of the source (which can be a code letter matching your source card, the author's name, a shortened title, or whatever you need for positive identification)

   - a label for the topic covered on this card (often called a *slug*)

   - your actual notes

   - the page number(s) where you found this material

Sample Note Card

Petroski, *Everyday Things*

① Designer's first objective

Petroski points out that in designing anything, the most important goal is to get the thing to work—to perform as it's supposed to. Unfortunately, the designer becomes more familiar with the project, whether it's a steel bridge, a gardening tool, or a pocketknife, than anyone else. Therefore, the designer also needs to anticipate how the object might fail or be used by someone incorrectly. If the designer makes the mistake of assuming everyone who will use it is right handed, for example, the product will not be user-friendly for ten percent of the population right off.

pp. 242–43

Alternative Systems

There is no magic in a note card system! It simply provides one efficient way to organize your research so that you acquire the information you need. Some researchers prefer to use standard 8 ½" x 11" paper; others use notebooks of various sizes or types; a growing number use software programs, many of which are based on the standard index card approach.

No matter what method you use, safeguard your research materials carefully. Do not carry your entire collection of notes with you, especially if you are prone to losing things. If you use a computer, make back-up disks.