

Source

S _____ date _____

title (one line — if it will not fit, it is two cards)

author(s) _____

title _____

where and when published _____

pages / URL / DOI _____

One per book, article or site. Write the citation now, while it is open in front of you.

Quotation

Q _____ date _____

title (one line — if it will not fit, it is two cards)

from source S _____

page _____

The exact words, in quotation marks. If you paraphrase, say so on the card.

Claim

C _____ date _____

title (one line — if it will not fit, it is two cards)

supported by _____

One sentence you believe is true and intend to argue, with a verb. A topic is not a claim.

Counterpoint

X _____ date _____

title (one line — if it will not fit, it is two cards)

against claim C _____

its evidence _____

What the smartest person who disagrees would say, as strongly as they would say it.

Fact

F _____ date _____

title (one line — if it will not fit, it is two cards)

from source S _____

page _____

A date, a number, a finding, in your own words, with where it came from.

Thesis

T _____ date _____

title (one line — if it will not fit, it is two cards)

the claims it rests on _____

Written last. The one sentence that, if true, makes every claim in the row matter. Say what it does not claim.

Not used

_____ date _____

title (one line — if it will not fit, it is two cards)

why _____

The top card of the pile you did not use. Keep the pile; it shows the reading was wider than the paper.

The whole method on one card

1. One card per thing you found: sources, quotations, facts. Cite as you go.
2. One card per thing you think: claims and counterpoints, as full sentences.
3. Lay claims in a row; put evidence under each. Cut what has no evidence.
4. Find the thesis in what the claims have in common. Write it last.
5. Order the claims. Then try a different order. Keep the better one.
6. Write one bridge sentence at every junction.
7. Type it in order. The introduction goes last.
8. Keep the cards. Date them.

Print on card stock or paper; cut on the dotted lines. A pack of 3×5 index cards does the same job.