

# Do you have a good note taking system?

Whether you are more of a handwriting note taker or a computer notetaker, here are my favorite three programs to take notes.



Disclaimer: I actually still take notes by hand! **BUT**, I use these three programs to process my notes once they have been written by hand. Why would you bother? Here are three great advantages:

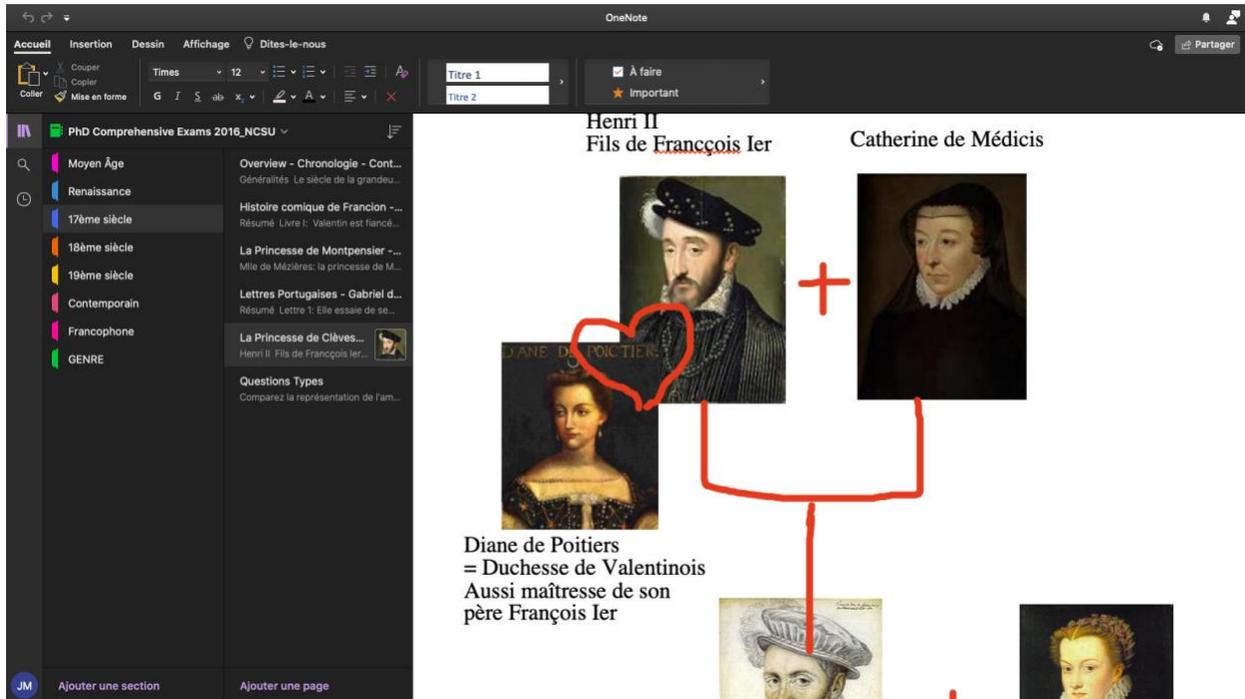
1. It allows you to **review** your notes and process them again;
2. You **retain** your notes better after a second or third pass.
3. It makes your notes **searchable**. When you start accumulating notes, trust me, you'll want your notes to be searchable to find your research easier and faster.

So here are top 3 tools I use:

## 1. Microsoft OneNote

I started using OneNote during my PhD program and in particular to organize my comps notes (comprehensive exam). Best thing is, OneNote is FREE thanks to [NCSU's license Microsoft Office 365](#).

I love that OneNote has binders to organize your notes, different pages on those notes to keep organized. You can insert a PDF on a page if you wish, and you can record audio right from the page.



I think OneNote is largely underrated for all that it can do. If you have an iPad, then you have the possibility to take notes with a pen or your finger, or even draw to illustrate your notes.

## 2. Notion

I love Notion for note taking and I use it for a lot more than that, such as using **roadmaps** for a big research project for instance. They have many reusable templates for your **class notes**, keep track of a **reading list**, **course schedule** etc. Best thing is, if you do sign up with Notion, you can get a FREE account with your university email account.

## Note Taking Systems - September 2020 - Dr. Montlouis-Gabriel's Guidelines

The screenshot shows a Notion page titled "Class Notes". At the top, there are navigation icons (back, forward) and a "Class Notes" title. Below the title, there is a brief introduction: "Use this template to capture notes from all of your classes. Check off your notes once you've reviewed them once. Notes are automatically dated when you create them. Click into an item to add unlimited notes, bookmarks, images, video... even a table of contents. Notes are tagged by course title/number! Some students prefer name their tags after professors". Below this, there is a "See All" button and a table of notes. The table has columns for "Reviewed", "Name", "Class", "Type", "Materials", and "Created". Two notes are listed: "Kazuo Ishiguro: Discussion" (ENG 455, Study Group, Sep 26, 2020 4:04 PM) and "Baroque Forms: Kandinsky" (ART 399, Section, https://open.sp..., Sep 26, 2020 4:04 PM). At the bottom, there are several "Calculate" buttons.

Pro tip: if you're into tutorial and are sold on how Notion looks and feel, check out [Ali Abdaal's YouTube videos about Notion](#) and note taking.

### 3. Citation Management System (CMS)

When I take notes on secondary sources, I usually prefer to do so on my FREE CMS of preference, **Mendeley**. Mendeley (or Zotero, or EndNote) does more than just compile your PDFs and references, it also has the capability to hold your quotes, your notes.

The screenshot shows the Mendeley Notebook interface. At the top, there is a "Library" tab and a "Notebook" tab. Below the tabs, there is a document titled "Race et théâtre: Un impensé politique, Chalaye S. 2020". The document is open to page 20 of 158. The text in the document is highlighted in yellow. A comment box is overlaid on the text, showing a comment from "Johanna" dated 9/21/2020. The comment reads: "Le Festival de Limoges ou le Théâtre international de langue française devenu Le Tarmac – scène internationale francophone, sont perçus comme les espaces culturels où les artistes d'Afrique et des outre-mers devraient trouver leur place sur les plateaux, puisque ces lieux sont dévolus aux expressions francophones d'Afrique et d'ailleurs." Below the comment box, there is another comment from "Johanna" dated 9/16/2020, which reads: "Du coup, ces espaces apparaissent comme de nouveaux enclos pour les artistes noirs qui n'appartiennent pourtant pas à un "en dehors du territoire national", qui ne viennent pas d'"ailleurs". Leurs attaches européennes sont souvent aussi importantes que leurs liens avec l'Afrique ou les territoires ultramarins." The interface also shows a "COMMENTS" section on the right side of the document.

- All of your notes can be arranged in a **Notebook** (new feature of Mendeley).
- You can also make **collections** to organize your articles. For instance, I have a Collection called "Chapter 1" where I store all of the references I need for this chapter. If I'm just beginning a project, I am actually organizing my collections via themes: "transnational feminism", "respectability", "visual art" etc... This helps me stay organized and never lose a quote.
- And again, all of this is **searchable**! You can add keywords to each article or book you are reading. If you are ready to learn more about why you need a CMS, then read about it in my separate page about it.

As usual use what serves you and leave what does not serve you!