

What follows is a suggested template for taking notes on secondary sources (i.e., works of historiography - books, journal articles, dissertations, etc.):

Source:

Insert here the full, proper, Chicago Manual of Style citation – either footnote or bibliography format or both – for the source that you're summarizing. (See "Chicago Style Annotation" handout for more details.)

Central Question(s):

Insert here what you take to be the question or set of questions to which the book or article you're summarizing purports to answer. Sometimes this question or set of questions will be explicit (usually spelled out in the introduction). Other times it'll only be implicit, and you'll have to infer it.

Thesis:

Insert here what you take to be the thesis of the book or article you're summarizing. Sometimes the historian cues you into the thesis with statements such as "I argue," or "I contend," etc. Other times the thesis is less explicitly presented. Whether explicit or implicit, the thesis is the interpretive posture assumed, argument to be made, position to be defended, etc., in its most pithy analytic articulation - the answer to the central question(s) you've previously identified.

Examples of Evidence in Support of the Thesis:

Insert here some key pieces of supporting evidence that the historian brings in defense of his/her thesis. You'll find the supporting evidence in the chapters (or pages) that follow the introduction. Sometimes, in the case of books, chapters serve as building blocks in the construction of the overarching thesis. Other times they're less cumulative and provide different types of evidence in support of the overarching thesis.

Chapter or Section Summaries:

Depending on how carefully you want to read, you may or may not want to include a brief summary of each chapter (or section, in the case of articles). Here try answering the question: How does this chapter (or section) advance the overall thesis?

Critique/Questions/Reflections:

Insert here, your reactions to the book, what types of questions it raises for you, what are its strengths and weaknesses, how does it relate to other books and articles that you've read on the topic, etc.