Before you take detailed notes from a source you find, make sure it will provide suitable information to help you write a research essay.

Give yourself a quick idea of the information contained within it to see if it really serves your purposes:

> check the date of publication
> notes about the author
> table of contents / index
> skim the preface, introduction / chapter headings / summaries

Title of the book/magazine:

What does the title suggest?

Who is the author?

Author’s title or position?

Is there a C.V. or list of publications?

What are the author’s credentials (experience, education, etc.) for writing on the topic?

What is the article about?

Can you understand the terminology? If not, is there a glossary?

Do you have enough background information about the topic to understand what you are reading?
What is the purpose of the book/article? To inform? To influence? To explain? To define? etc.)

Who is the intended reader? (General public or scholars in a given field?)

Is the book or the article a general work that provides an overview of the topic or is it specifically focussed on only one aspect of your topic?

Is the information mainly factual or opinion based?

Does the author promote a particular point of view or does he address all sides of the issue?

If the author promotes a particular point of view what is that point of view?

Does the author give enough evidence to support the assertions he or she makes?

If the author addresses all sides of the issue what are the arguments?

Does the book provide the information necessary to build the bibliographic citation?

Write a paragraph describing how the information that this source provides will be useful for your research paper.