

Note-Taking Skills

An Introduction

Effective note-taking from lectures and readings is an essential skill for university study. Good note taking allows a permanent record for revision and a register of relevant points that you can integrate with your own writing and speaking. Good note-taking reduces the risk of plagiarism. It also helps you distinguish where your ideas came from and how you think about those ideas.

Effective note-taking requires:

- recognising the main ideas
- identifying what information is relevant to your task
- having a system of note taking that works for you
- reducing the information to note and diagram format
- where possible, putting the information in your own words
- recording the source of the information

Reading Note-taking Strategies

1. Be Selective and Systematic

As you take notes from a written source, keep in mind that not all of a text may be relevant to your needs. Think about your purpose for reading.

- Are you reading for a general understanding of a topic or concept?
- Are you reading for some specific information that may relate to the topic of an assignment?

Before you start to take notes, skim the text. Then highlight or mark the main points and any relevant information you may need to take notes from. Finally—keeping in mind your purpose for reading—read the relevant sections of the text carefully and take separate notes as you read.

A Few Tips About Format

Set out your notebooks so that you have a similar format each time you take notes.

- Columns that distinguish the source information and your thoughts can be helpful.
- Headings that include bibliographic reference details of the sources of information are also important.
- The use of colour to highlight major sections, main points and diagrams makes notes easy to access.

2. Identify the Purpose and Function of a Text

Whether you need to make notes on a whole text or just part of it, identifying the main purpose and function of a text is invaluable for clarifying your note-taking purposes and saving time.

- Read the title and the abstract or preface (if there is one)
- Read the introduction or first paragraph
- Skim the text to read topic headings and notice how the text is organised
- Read graphic material and predict its purpose in the text

Your aim is to identify potentially useful information by getting an initial overview of the text (chapter, article, pages ...) that you have selected to read. Ask yourself; will this text give me the information I require and where might it be located in the text?

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