

Note-Taking Skills

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

Effective notetaking 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

Strategies for Taking Notes While Reading

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?

3. Identify how information is organised

Most texts use a range of organising principles to develop ideas. While most good writing will have a logical order, not all writers will use an organising principle. Organising principles tend to sequence information into a logical hierarchy, some of which are:

- Past ideas to present ideas
- The steps or stages of a process or event
- Most important point to least important point
- Well known ideas to least known ideas
- Simple ideas to complex ideas
- General ideas to specific ideas
- The largest parts to the smallest parts of something
- Problems and solutions

- Causes and results

An example: Look at the text on underwater cameras below and then look at how the text is presented in note form. The most important words to include in notes are the information words. These are usually nouns, adjectives and verbs.

Underwater Cameras

Regular cameras obviously will not function underwater unless specially protected. Though housings are available for waterproofing 35 mm and roll-film cameras, a few special models are amphibious -they can be used above or below the water. Most of these cameras are snapshot models, but one, Nikonos, is a true 35 mm system camera. Though lenses and film must be changed on the surface, the camera will otherwise function normally at depths down to 70 mm. Four lenses are available : two of these , which have focal lengths of 90 mm and 35 mm, will function in air and water; the other two of these, which have focal lengths of 90 mm and 35 mm, will function in air and water; the other two, the 28 and 15 mm lenses, work only under water. Lenses are also available from other manufacturers.

Underwater Cameras

1. Regular Cameras
special housing necessary

2. Amphibious
a) snapshot models
b) Nikonos (35 mm)

Lenses
i) air & water 35 mm
90 mm
ii) only under water 28 mm
15 mm

Source: Freeman, M 1994, *The encyclopaedia of practical photography*, Quarto Books, London, p. 283

4. Include your thoughts

When taking notes for an assignment it is also helpful to record your thoughts at the time. Record your thoughts in a separate column or margin and in a different colour to the notes you took from the text.

- What ideas did you have about your assignment when you read that information?
- How do you think you could use this information in your assignment?