

Note-making

Why make notes?

Why should you make notes? There are several reasons why note making is such an important part of your academic research.

Effective note making is part of the bigger picture of successful academic practice. It is one of a series of tasks you need to do to produce an effective, well written assignment and well researched assignment.

Your tasks will include:

1. analysing your assignment question carefully,
2. gathering information,
3. note-making,
4. paraphrasing,
5. synthesising,
6. paragraph writing and
7. referencing.

They all work together towards a finished product – your written assignment!

More reasons why effective note-making is important

Note-making also allows you to learn about your research subject. Effective note-making means that you don't just remember the ideas of others. It is not just 'note-taking.' In note-making you will also expand the way you think about your topic and produce new ideas of your own: it allows you to formulate ideas, and allow these ideas to become part of your knowledge. That is,

- it allows you to learn and think about your research subject,
- the process allows you to formulate ideas, and
- by organising others' ideas into your own structure, they become part of your knowledge.

What to take from the text

Sometimes it can be hard to know what to write down when you are taking notes and what to leave out!

You might ask: "I don't know which part is important"

- To the author, ALL of it is important
- To the scholar, the part/s that provide information AND evidence to give support to your assignment argument.

Always have your assignment question **and** your own thesis statement in mind when you take notes.

Remember what the question is asking and how **you** have decided to answer it. Then look for information and evidence that relate to those two things.

To see the IMPORTANT parts, you must read with the question and thesis statement in mind

More tips on what to take

Other tips for effective note-making include learning to make notes only on what you need. Items that are often important to note down include:

- names,
- dates,
- specialised terms in your subject area,
- key arguments the author is making and
- evidence for and against your own ideas.

Avoid falling into the trap of writing things down 'just in case' you 'might' need it!

What else to look for

Don't forget to look for 'signpost phrases' or **transition markers**. These are phrases that connect different sentences. They communicate **relationships between ideas**.



Some more Transition markers

Transition markers perform different functions. Some of them tell you that the next point will exemplify or illustrate the previous point. Or they might acknowledge that there is another side to the argument, through words like 'although' or 'despite this'. They can also tell you the author is about to sum up or give you the results of the experiment or research. Specifically,

- **Exemplifying:** for example, for instance, in particular, to illustrate
- **Conceding a point:** although true, even though, although, despite this
- **Summing up:** to summarise, to conclude, in conclusion, clearly then
- **Stating a result:** therefore, thus, as a result, consequently, accordingly, for that reason.

Repeat transition

Other transition markers are words that are repeated at the beginning and end of paragraphs. This can tell you that they are important or worth noting down.

For example:

Hard work, specialist knowledge, and the ability to apply yourself to new situations are the keys to professional success.

Professional success is not, however, the only factor in leading a fulfilling life.

Repeat transitions can also give you clues about the next step in the author's argument.

For example:

... in these conditions students are not motivated to perform well. Such a lack of motivation must be addressed by analysis of the learning situation.

Learn to recognise the signs: then you can see the direction in advance and your brain is in gear to pick up the important parts.

When do I start making notes?

Prepare your page **BEFORE** you start reading. Even before you start reading it is important to make some notes on things you already know or want to find the answers to.

Things you already know could include:

- the topic,
- your thesis statement in response to the topic,
- key words you know are important, and
- bibliographical details of the work.

Then you could note down your own questions or particular things you would like to find the answers to in your reading.

There are three different times you could be taking notes

The first is **before** you begin reading a paper or article.

The second type of note making takes place **during** your reading or listening to a lecture. This kind of note making has two distinct phases:

The first phase is reading for quick key points. Reading for quick key points is when you can scan or skim.

Scanning is looking for the answer to a particular question you already had before you began reading the page.

Skimming is reading down the page quickly to get a general idea as to what the text is about.

The second phase of note making during reading is reading for detail. Note making skills you could use at this stage could include:

underlining,

highlighting and

selecting words and phrases to note down carefully.

The final type of note-making occurs **after**; it is when you read over your notes to make sure they make sense and to cut out anything you don't really need.

Always distinguish between your ideas and someone else's

At any stage of your note making it is essential to distinguish between your ideas and those belonging to another person or group.

One way to ensure you do not plagiarise or write down another person's ideas as your own is to always provide bibliographic details for any ideas that do not belong to you. This will ensure that you do not accidentally include those ideas in your own work when you come to revise or summarise a topic.



For example:

Smith, 1997, p. 34.

Forming new ideas while note making

When you are making notes new ideas may occur to you that have been inspired by the thoughts of others.

Arriving at these new ideas is an important and exciting part of the note-making process. Your own pre-existing ideas plus the ideas of others (which you always acknowledge through careful referencing) can lead to new ideas of your own.



How to take notes when they are handwritten

How should you take notes by hand?

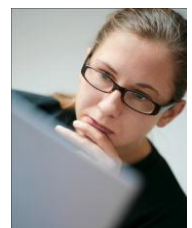
Make sure you leave spaces around your notes. The brain likes clear spaces!

Don't forget to write down the date, the author of the paper, the title, publication details and date of the work and any relevant page numbers.

These tips are useful for when you come to revise later. Also, the brain likes things to be filed and organised!

How to take notes when you are using a laptop


When you are using a laptop to take notes shut down all other programs – such as internet chat sites and social pages – to avoid distractions. This will stop you from making mistakes in your notes. Also make a note of the **date**, the **name of the author** of the paper you are reading, the **title** and **date** of the paper, publication details and any **relevant page numbers**.



The **EndNote** software is very useful for keeping track of bibliographical information.

How to make notes - More useful tips

When taking notes it can be useful to make words or phrases stand out from each other. This can be done by:

- using asterisks, 
- putting important points into boxes, or
- **highlighting** parts that are linked together in the same colour.

You can also:

- use underlined headings and sub-headings,
- break up your notes into manageable chunks, and
- create your own symbols.

Seven step cycle

Remember that note making is part of a seven step cycle. This cycle includes:

1. **reading** the question,
2. initial **thinking** and planning (brainstorming),
3. **looking for sources** (no more than 3 at this stages),
4. **reading** (use academic reading techniques),
5. **note-making** (always with the question and thesis statement in mind),
6. **writing** (one, two or three middle paragraphs – quoting, paraphrasing, synthesising from your notes),
and
7. **Restart the cycle** until the written assignment is complete with Introduction and Conclusion.

You might find you work through this cycle several times before your assignment is complete.

One final tip on Note-making!

Always keep in mind the fact that your notes are part of a larger plan. Try not to become distracted by details which don't relate to your assignment topic. And add your own ideas to those belonging to others as often as you can. This will ensure that you keep thinking as you make your notes and don't slip into 'robot-mode.'

Remember...

- You're not making notes as an isolated activity.
- You are making notes to use others' information and ideas to develop your own thoughts in your own assignment.
- In your note-making, it is also good to add your own ideas along the way – this work is part of 'synthesising' which will be examined later in this program.