

Note Taking Methods

The ability to remember, reproduce, and reflect on the subject matter is an important part of studying. You can easily forget what you just heard in the classroom or read in a book. Therefore, it is important that you have some way of noting and processing all the knowledge you receive during your study.

WHY TAKE NOTES?

When you take notes, it helps you to remember what you have learnt and improve your understanding.

Notes are more than mere pieces of paper you can pull out of the drawer and use before an exam. Note-taking is also a way to store and remember what you learn.

Taking notes also keeps you focused during class and prevents your mind from wandering.

In addition, it promotes the processing of the material and provides an overview. Notes help you understand what you hear or read because you engage with the material and underline the most important points.

NOTES WHILE READING

HOW DO I TAKE NOTES WHILE READING?

Good reading notes means that you do not have to read the same text twice, because at the first reading, you marked the main passages and noted down the main points.

The better your notes are, the better prepared you are for classes and exams. It may be a good idea to write notes in the margin. Briefly write down what a specific section is about, or if you have any questions about the text which you need to look into. You can also choose to highlight particularly important words and phrases or use post-it notes to divide the book into important and less important sections.

Note-taking techniques:

- 1. Write phrases, not full sentences.** Only record the key words that you need to get the idea of the point. Skip words like “the” and “a” that don’t add additional meaning to the lecture content. Retain key technical or discipline-specific terms.
- 2. Take notes in your own words.** Paraphrase what you hear so it makes sense to you—it helps you to understand and remember what you hear. Try to paraphrase everything except where information needs to be noted exactly.
- 3. Structure your notes with headings, subheadings and numbered lists.** Use headings to indicate topic areas or to include bibliographic details of the sources of information.

Use outline form and/or a numbering system and indenting to help you distinguish major from minor points and as a clear way of indicating the structure of lecture information.

4. Code your notes—use colour and symbols to mark structure and emphasis.

Use colors to highlight major sections, main points and diagrams. You can also use different colors to classify and link concepts or information by topic. However, don't focus too much on color coding when you're in the lecture. It requires time and concentration, so it's more useful to do most of the highlighting and underlining when you're revising your notes later.

Underline, circle, star, etc. to identify key information, examples, definitions, or other important materials. Devise your own marking code to indicate each type.

5. If you miss something, write key words, skip a few spaces, and get the information later. Leave a space on the page for your own notes and comments.

6. Use Symbols and Abbreviations

Symbols and abbreviations for frequently used words, phrases or names are useful for note taking in lectures when speed is essential. It's important to be consistent so you remember what they represent and can use them easily. Keep a 'key list' of frequently used symbols/abbreviations and their meanings so that you can refer to them in the future.

Three abbreviation techniques

1. Use the first few letters of the word

Use just enough to remember what the abbreviation stands for. Ensure that there are enough letters to prevent confusion between other words with the same first letters.

For example:

- imp for 'important'
- info for 'information'
- eval for 'evaluation'
- dev for 'development'
- gov for 'government'

2. Use initials for phrases

Examples:

- UP for 'University of Portsmouth'
- RS for 'reflective skills'
- LG for 'local government'; NG for 'national government'

3. Remove all (or most of) the vowels from the word

Use just the key consonants bunched together.

For example:

- mngmt for 'management'
- mkt for 'market' (and mkting for 'marketing')
- dvpt for 'development'

Common note-taking symbols

- & or + and, plus, with (the ampersand symbol can be difficult to draw freehand so many people use a squiggle to represent 'and')
- – minus, without
- = equals, is the same as, results in
- \neq does not equal, is not the same as, does not result in
- \approx is approximately equal to, is similar to
- < is less than, is smaller than
- > is greater than, is larger than
- ↑ increase, rise, growth
- ↑↑ rapid increase
- ↓ decrease, fall, shrinkage
- ↓↓ rapid decrease
- \Rightarrow or \therefore therefore, thus
- \rightarrow leads on to, produces, causes
- x no, not, incorrect
- xx definitely not, disproved
- ? uncertain, possibly, unproven
- ✓ yes, correct
- ✓✓ definitely, certain, proven
- # number
- $\boxed{*}$ special, important, notable (when added to a word or phrase)
- / per – for example, £50/day instead of 'fifty pounds per day'

Common general abbreviations

- c. approximately, roughly, about (abbreviation for the Latin 'circa')
- e.g. for example
- i.e. in other words (usually used when adding more detail or an explanation)
- cf. compared to, by comparison with
- w/ with
- w/o without
- v. very

- vv. extremely
- C century (e.g. C19 for 'nineteenth century')
- etc. and so on
- K or k a thousand (e.g. 500K for 'five hundred thousand')
- m a million (e.g. \$6m for 'six million dollars')
- vs. against

Note taking example

Imagine you heard the following in a lecture:

"The United Kingdom's population, at around sixty million, is similar to that of Italy, but Italy's population is now shrinking because its birth rate has fallen below its death rate. The UK's population is still growing, albeit very slowly – at a rate of 0.09% between 1995 and 2000."

Your notes could look like:

UK pop c60m \approx I. BUT I. \downarrow due BR < DR – cf. UK \uparrow slow ie 0.09% 95 – 2K

This is much quicker to write down than trying to capture the whole sentence, and you haven't missed any key information. It's also easy to understand when you know what each symbol means.