

# Note Taking

# Introduction

By now, no matter which programme or course you are taking, you will have realised that as a student, you are receiving tons of information and it is your responsibility to sift through all this information and make sense of it.

Taking notes is a strategy you can use to help organise the influx of information. In the process, you may find that note taking helps you understand the information better.

Learn how to note take well so that you can manage your studies more effectively.

# General Tips

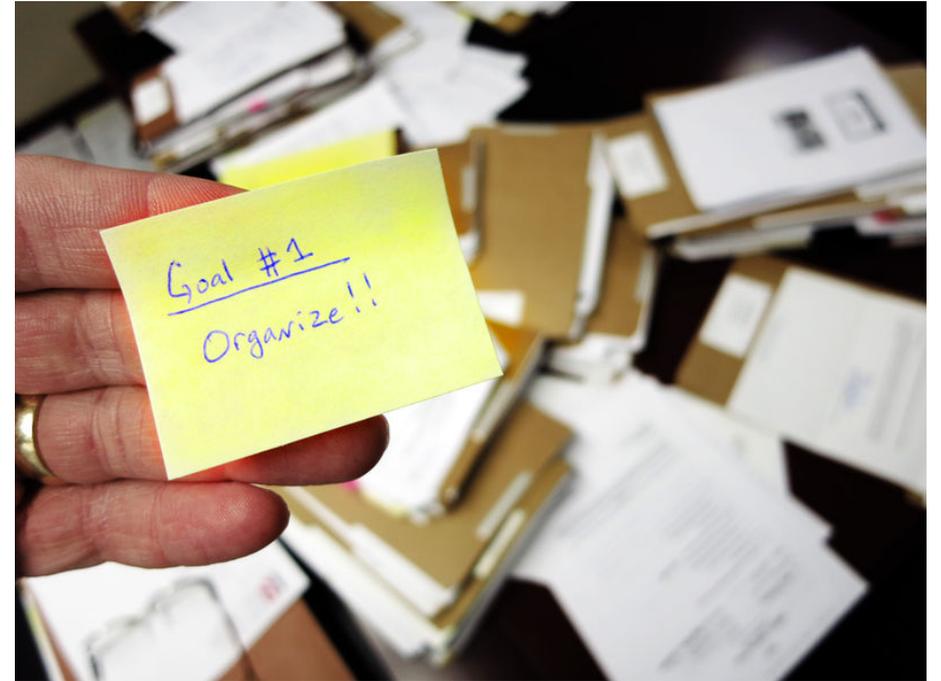
# Introduction

Have you ever highlighted portions of the text from your textbook while reading it? Or underlined sentences you felt were conveying an important point? Are the margins of your textbook filled with your handwriting? Do you have sticky notes stuck in every other pages of your textbook?

If you answered “Yes” to any of the three questions, congratulations, you are already doing something that is important for effective revision. Highlighting, underlining and the sticky notes ensure attention is focused on information you deemed important.

However, if you make your own notes from these highlighted information, you may find that the note-taking process may improved your revision effort. This is because the act of writing is a form of repeating the information in your brain and this repetition will aid the retention of the information.

For truly effective note-taking, it is not a matter of re-copying the information. You should process and organise the information. These are some tips on how to organise the information for your note-taking.



# General Strategies For Note Taking

- **Note main ideas and key words**

As you take note of the main ideas and key words, add some details, supporting facts or examples to add clarity to the main ideas and key words

- **Use your own words**

Re-writing the content means you need to understand the content before you can write with your own words. This ensures better learning.

- **Write phrases – not sentences**

Remember you are making notes of important ideas. You are not re-copying what is in the reading material. Writing phrases instead of sentences will reduce the copying tendency. It may also force you to write in your own words.

- **Use abbreviations**

This is necessary if you are taking notes while listening to your lecturer. Use abbreviations for quicker note-taking.

- **Link up your points**

As you take note of the important ideas, make sure to understand them in relation to other ideas you have taken note of. Link up the ideas with arrows, dotted lines, colours, numbers, etc. This way, you are not only making notes of the individual points but you are studying the full picture as well.

# Taking Notes for Academic Writing

# Introduction

Whether it is an essay, a report, or a research paper, there is no escaping from writing papers as a tertiary student. You will find that developing good note taking habits can help the writing process.

Before you write, you will be researching for materials and resources for your paper. Most likely, you will be overwhelmed with the wealth of information your research turns up. Therefore, it is important to keep track of the information as you gather them. Keeping good notes of your research efforts will help as you start your writing.



# Effective Note Taking for Academic Writing

The main purpose of note taking for academic writing is to help you focus on the information from the sources that your research efforts have discovered. Therefore, these are the things you should be taking notes of as you gather your sources:

- **Bibliographic details**

Write down the details about the source – author, title, date of publication, publisher or URL. Give a number to each source. The numbering system will be useful (and helps save a lot of time) when you need to write up your citations for your paper. They will serve as a reference to your references.

As you are reading the sources, follow these strategies to take effective notes from your sources. Done well, these note taking strategies will also help you better understand the sources.

- **Extracting only relevant information from the source**

To do this, you need to have some preliminary ideas of relevant topics to your paper. Write down topic headings which will help focus your attention to relevant information as you read. Note down information such as facts, theories or opinions that will help your writing.

- **Take notes in these three formats: summary, paraphrase or direct quotations**

Try to avoid copying large chunks of information – this is not an efficient way of taking notes. Instead, summarize the ideas you find useful. Paraphrase it if you can – in any case, you will need to paraphrase when you integrate the information into your writing to avoid committing plagiarism. Copy down direct quotations only if you find the ideas are too memorable to be paraphrased. Remember to add quotation marks and the page number – this is to remind yourself that it is a direct quotation whereas the page number may be needed for citation.

You may consider using this template to take notes while doing your readings.

<b>Bibliographic details</b>		<b>Additional comments</b>
<b>Notes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Summarized or paraphrased ideas</li><li>• Direct quotations</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Page number</li><li>• Page number</li></ul>	

Template adapted from UNSW Sydney. (2015, January 19). *Notemaking from written text*. Retrieved from <https://student.unsw.edu.au/notemaking-written-text>

To extend your note taking effort to structuring your paper, you may want to consider using index cards when note taking. Use one card for each source. To help construct your paper, you could group the cards accordingly. This provides a visual representation of your thinking before you write your paper. You could also move the cards around as your paper develops.

# Taking Notes for Revision

# Introduction

No matter how interesting a topic is, reading for your studies is never as fun as reading for leisure – somehow your eyes tend to “glaze over” after reading a few pages (or a few paragraphs for some of us) of your textbook.

Note taking forces you to read with more attention and purpose, which leads to better processing and understanding of the readings. This in turn leads to more effective revision.

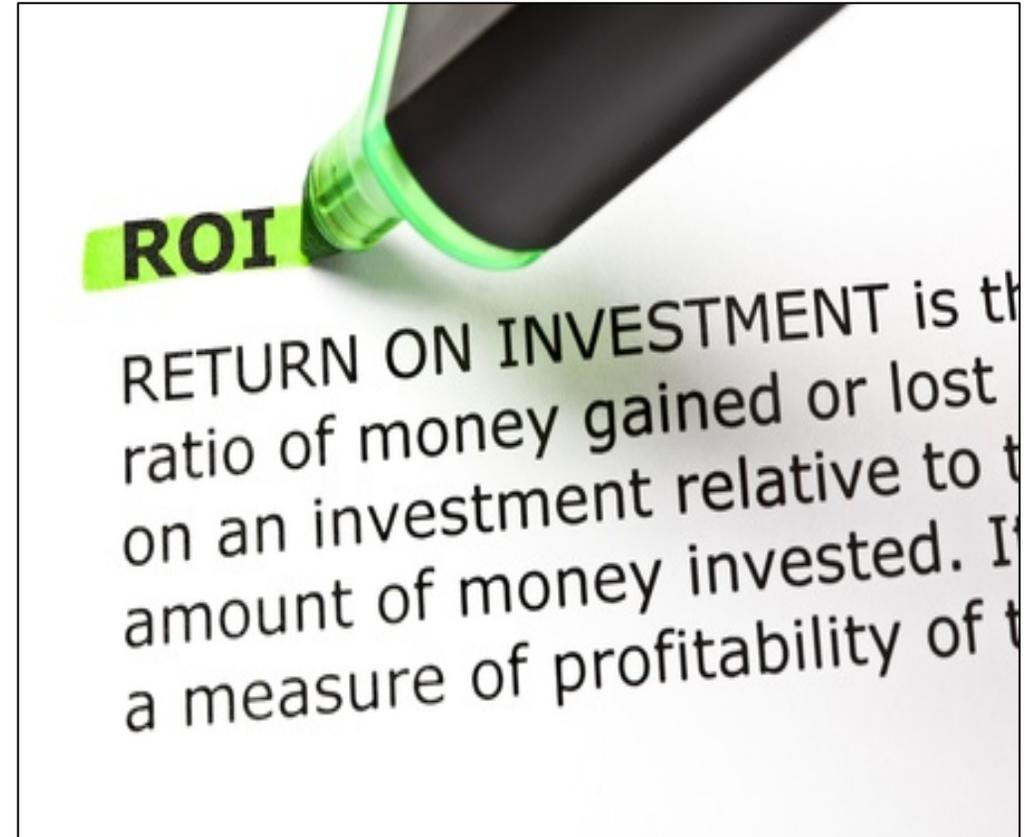


# Effective Note Taking for Revision

While reading your textbook, look out for these types of information:

- Definitions
- Concepts
- Theories
- Examples

You may choose to highlight or underline them so that they are kept in your “radar”. In addition, write a few words to explain why they are important.



# Effective Note Taking for Revision

You should also consider summarising what you have read in in your own words. The summarized notes is useful for a quick review of important information. Moreover, this process of condensing the information in your own words forces you to understand the subject matter, which is the main objective of revision.

To summarise effectively, here are some tips:

- **Determine the focus of the summary**

Give a title to the summary. This will help you concentrate on the relevant information for the summary. For example, “Differences between socialism and communism” or “Types of projects for project management”.

- **Delete unnecessary information**

This is part of condensing. You will need to understand the content you are reading in order to know what unnecessary information to delete – this process forces you to achieve what you set up to do during revision – which is to ensure you learn well through understanding, not simply passive reading.

- **Use questions to guide the summarisation**

When reading your textbook, ask yourself questions that help you understand underlying issues. Then, summarise the answers in your own words. Examples of questions that encourage deepening of comprehension are “What is the relevance of this information?” or “Does this information answer a particular question?”.

- **Use index cards**

Index cards are ideal for writing your summarized notes. The size of index card will limit how much you can write, which forces you to focus and be concise with your summaries. Index cards are also very portable – this means you can easily carry them around and review your notes whenever you have pockets of free time, be it on the bus or the train or while waiting for the lift.

- **Connect the dots**

You may make very good summaries or notes but it is not good enough if you are unable to connect the individual summaries or notes to form a full picture of what you are studying. Draw together the main points from each summary to get an overall conceptual understanding of the topic. You may want to use the mapping method ([see Note Taking Systems](#)) to help you see the connections.

# Summary Tables

For those of you who like to make more structured notes as you revise, you may consider using summary tables. Structuring your notes around tables are useful especially if the revision content focuses on evaluating or comparing competing concepts, themes, or theories.

	Advantages	Disadvantages	Comments
Concept A			
Concept B			
Concept C			

Table template adapted from The Open University. (2017). *Summary Table*. Retrieved from <http://www2.open.ac.uk/students/skillsforstudy/summarising-your-work.php>

# Taking Notes During Lecture

# Introduction

Some students may be wondering why is there a need to take notes during lectures (or seminars) when most instructors provide handouts (most of the time in the form of PowerPoint slides used in class). Here are some reasons why you should be taking notes, on top of what is provided by your instructors.

**Reason #1:** The notes provided by your instructors may only cover key ideas. You will need to take note of the explanations, elaborations and examples provided by the instructors during lectures and seminars.

**Reason #2:** Memory research studies by psychologists such as Hermann Ebbinghaus have shown that we rapidly forget things that we have learnt, sometimes in minutes after learning. Taking notes during lecture or seminar serves as a record, to help us patch up the gaps due to forgetting.

**Reason #3:** So in today's time, there is usually a recording of the lecture or seminar for classroom replay. Therefore, some may argue that it is not necessary to take notes since you can always watch/listen to the lecture or seminar again. But seriously, do you really want to spend another 3 hours listening to your instructor again, which you can avoid if you have done detailed note taking the first time round.....

**Reason #4:** And to keep you awake during lectures and seminars, why not take notes....the process will help you concentrate and the side benefit is.... You learn better!!!

## Before Lecture

- Come prepared – Do some background reading of the lecture/seminar topic. It will be easier to pick out the important information to take notes of if you have some ideas about the topic
- Go through the handouts – Familiarising yourself with the agenda of the lecture/seminar session will help you understand what the instructor is saying. This way, you will be able to differentiate key ideas from filler information and take better notes of the key information.

## During Lecture

- Be on time – Arriving early means you can choose a seat conducive for seeing and listening clearly to the instructor. The beginning of the lecture/seminar is also when the instructor outlines the objective and structure of the session. This information can guide your note taking as you can start planning your note taking strategy. For example, you may decide that a concept map or a table may be a more suitable note taking strategy based on the objective of the session.
- Label your notes – To keep track of your notes, remember to jot down topic and date of the lecture/seminar.
- Do not copy verbatim what the instructor is saying – It is impossible to write down everything the instructor is saying. Write down key terms, lists, facts and figures.
- Be aware of key phrases used by instructors to pre-empt important information - When the instructor uses phrases like “there are three reasons for .....” or “the main idea behind.....”, be prepared to take note of the following information as they are bound to be important information.
- Note connecting ideas – Note how the instructor transit from one key idea/concept/theory to another key idea/concept/theory. Rather than just pieces of information, these transition information are important as they inform the development of ideas and help to form a full conceptual picture of the topic.
- Details are important – The details are sometimes left out of PowerPoint slides. Therefore, these are the information you should take note of, to fully capture the essence of the lecture/seminar.

## After Lecture

- Review your notes – Do this as soon as possible after the lecture. While the lecture/seminar is still fresh in your mind, go through your notes to see if there are information you missed. Fill these gaps. If there are points to clarify, take note of them and clarify them with the instructor during the next session.
- Summarise key points – As a process to organise your notes and a form of a quick revision, this is a good and effective learning habit to develop.

# Note Taking Systems

# Introduction

These are some note taking systems you may use to your preference:

1. The Cornell Method
2. Mapping Method
3. Charting Method

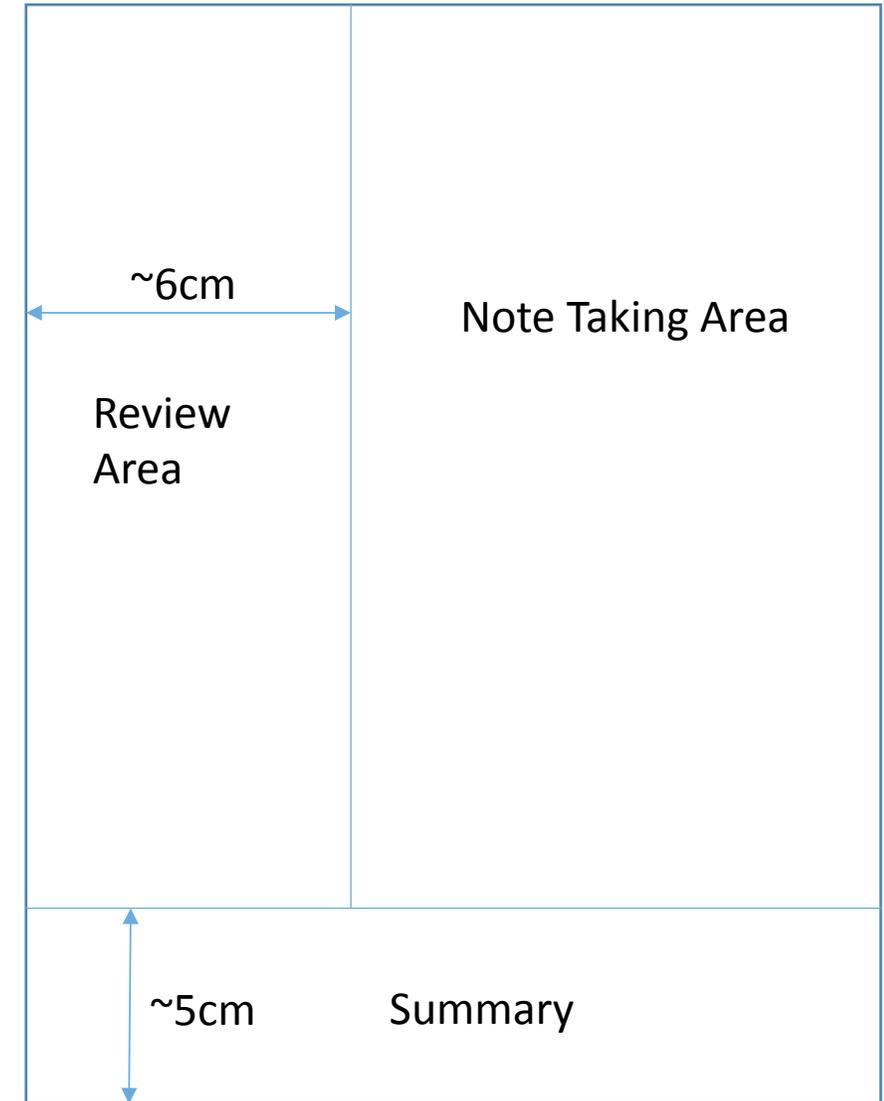


# The Cornell Method

The Cornell method, developed by Dr Walter Pauk of Cornell University, provides a simple but useful structure for condensing and organising notes without laborious recopying. This method is usually recommended for taking lecture notes but you can certainly adapt it for any note taking situation.

- **Divide your paper into three sections** – a margin (~6cm) to the left of the paper, a margin (~5cm) at the bottom of the paper and a main writing area to the right of the paper (see example)
- **Note Taking Area**
  - This area is for taking lecture notes. Skip a few lines after every main point made by the instructor. After class, review the notes as soon as possible. Use the spaces to fill up/complete any details you may have missed during the lecture. Read **Taking Notes During Lecture** to find out more about taking good lecture notes.
- **Review Area**
  - As you review your lecture notes, write key words or phrases that summarise the main point of the lecture notes in this area. Test yourself how much you remember by covering the note taking area and using only the key words and phrases to recall the main points covered by the instructor.
- **Summary**
  - Prepare and write a summary of the lecture notes in your words in this area. This process helps consolidate learning as you identify critical information and understand them when writing the summary. It could also make obvious that you need further clarification from your instructors if you cannot pick out the key points for the summary.

Check out this link to generate Cornell Note Taking lined paper  
<http://incompetech.com/graphpaper/cornelllined/>



# Mapping Method

For visual learners, the mapping method may be your preferred note taking method. The mapping method uses diagrams, pictures or any type of graphics as the main tools to denote and organize information. The strength of the mapping method is that it easily shows connections and relationships between ideas. Tony Buzan's mind mapping is one of the most commonly-known mapping method. Other mapping methods include spidergram and concept map. To learn about the differences between these mapping methods, follow these links:

- <http://www.michaelonmindmapping.com/mind-maps/spidergrams-and-mind-mapping-whats-the-difference/>
- <https://www.edrawsoft.com/mind-map-and-spidergram.php>
- <http://mindmappingsoftwareblog.com/concept-maps-vs-mind-maps/>

Whether you prefer mind mapping, concept maps or spidergram, these are the general strategies you could use while note taking via the mapping method:

- Identify the main topic/concept/idea.
- Conceptualize it with an image or a few key words. If you use key words, draw a bubble around the words.
- Identify sub-topics or supporting ideas. Similarly, conceptualize them with an image or a few key words with a bubble around them to encapsulate the words.
- The image or word bubble of the sub-topics should be placed around the main topic. Draw arrows or lines to connect the images or word bubbles.
- Continue until all relevant sub-topics or ideas have been drawn and connected.
- Use different colours or symbols to code or emphasise different ideas. For example red ink to emphasise main topic. Or square boxes to denote facts while circles denote examples.

# Charting Method

The charting method is a very systematic note taking style for making highly-organized notes. Using tables, each topic is given a row and each column captures a category of analysis students need to conduct for the particular topic. This results in a highly organized fact sheet for each topic covered. Differences and similarities between topics are also easily spotted as the table format allows for easy comparison.

To use the charting methods, divide the paper into rows and columns. The number of rows and columns to be created will be determined by the number of topics you have and the number of categories of analysis you have identified. The following are examples of note taking using the charting method.

For comparison between theories

Types of Learning Theory	Theorist's Name	Weakness	Strength

For charting information in chronological order

Period	Important Writer	Significant Writing Style	Representative Works

# Additional References and Resources

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