Research and Study Skills: Introduction to Note Taking

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Hello and welcome to Education Outreach’s Introduction to Note Taking. My name is Sarah and I am a Senior Education Outreach Officer at the University of Leeds. Today I will be discussing the key points of taking good notes. This is a skill that all students engaging in higher education and further education will need throughout their academic career. It is also a skill that will develop the longer you have been practising it.

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This session will cover all the important aspects of what makes an effective note taker and is useful to anyone considering higher and further education. During this session we will cover

- What is Note Taking
- Note Taking Techniques
- How to Take Better Notes

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What is Note Taking? Note making is not just about writing down everything you hear or read. It is a process of reviewing, connecting and synthesising ideas. Consider note taking as an active and reflective process.

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There are many benefits to note taking; It can help you stay active and engaged in your research. It allows you to understand content more deeply and clarify your thought processes. It enables you to be selective and pick out key ideas. It can make your material more memorable (which is key for revision and reflection). It can help you to organise your ideas and make connections between sources, and, it is useful for planning and structuring written assignments. Note taking also helps avoid plagiarism.
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All good notes should include

- The date. Make a note of the date you are reading or looking at your source material, this will help you keep track of your research.
- Include the source information. Make sure you write down the following: author, title, publisher, date of publishing, page numbers -anything you might include in a reference.
- Have clear headings and subheadings. Which aspect of your research does this source contribute to?
- Don’t forget to include ideas and prompts for further research and study. Did this source reference another work which seems to fit in well with your research? If it did, write it down.

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Be smart in your approach to note taking. Set yourself goals which are: Specific, Measurable, Agreed Upon, Realistic and Time based. Think about: Why you are reading this source. What information are you looking for? How long are you going to spend looking at this one source? Be realistic about how much you can gain from one text; you will need to look at more than one source to gain your information.

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Paper note taking is one of the most common styles of making notes, and can be supported using sticky notes or flashcards, diagrams and doodles, highlighters and colour coding.

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There are three main styles of note taking technique. The first the Linear Technique, which is the most widespread and recognisable form of note taking. It integrates headings, subheadings and underlining to clarify the most important sections, and uses arrows, dashes and equals signs to signify interrelated material.
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Another common style of note taking is the Pattern Technique or Mind Maps. These are a very visual note taking technique which often incorporate colour for themes and clarity. They can include diagrams, sketches, and doodles, to aid the memory.

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The Cornell Technique or the Column Technique is the last technique we will discuss. It is a reflective form of note taking, and ensures you engage in active note taking by summarising material as you go. It is based on two columns and summary section. The right-hand column is for general notes, the left is for keywords, questions and references and the bottom is for summary’s and concluding remarks.

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There are also lots of ways to support your research through digital note taking. Apps like Evernote are suitable for all devices: laptops, tablets, phones. You can use them to photograph your hand-written notes and sync them with your digital findings. SimpleNote and Notability are apps designed specifically for IPad users and ideal for people who like notes to be eye catching. You can also use PDF annotations which is an in-text note making tool, with small icons that can run along the main text highlighting key information.

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You can improve your note taking ability by following the next three steps. Make sure you are:

- Paraphrasing. Write things down in your own words, this forces you to take complicated ideas and make them simpler.
- Think about facts and keywords. What information will you need to know later? Write down things like dates, names and statistics; don’t try and write everything down, just stick to keywords and phrases that you will understand later.
- Think about the layout of your notes. If you have historical articles would writing your notes in timeline make sense? Could you put the notes in a table or a list?
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Always

- Keep accurate records of source details. When reading a subject related paper, article, book or website, make sure you take down all the details required for referencing in your notes.
- Keep notes from one source in one place. This will make writing your essay easier in the long run.
- Clearly mark quotations in your notes. When you are coping a source word for word, indicate this clearly in your notes, this helps you to know, what are and aren't your own words when it comes to referencing in an academic essay.
- Use online tools to help you. Software such as Endnote can help you build a database of references and Word also has functions for writing references.

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Ensure your notes are concise, clear and comprehensive. Are your notes expressing the most information you can fit in the smallest space? Can you understand your notes? And will you be able to next week? Are you sure you have the whole argument? Are you missing anything important?

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Remember notes taken within a research project are never complete-don’t be afraid of going back through them and editing them throughout your project.

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You can find out more information on note taking from the resources listed on the screen.

The University of Leeds: Skills Library: https://resources.library.leeds.ac.uk/note-taking/

The Learning Strategy Centre at Cornell University: http://lsc.cornell.edu/notes.html

The University of Leeds YouTube page: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaF3v0IMG9k
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Thank you for listening and enjoy the rest of your day.