

Making Notes

Why take notes?

Making notes gives reading and listening a purpose, and demands concentration. It focuses attention on the text, encouraging the sort of close reading that is necessary to support learning from texts. The aim is **not** to just replicate (copy) the text.

Effective note-taking forces the note-taker to **try to make sense** of the written or spoken text and to **think about the ideas** within it. The note-taker must engage with what the writer is saying in order to make decisions about **what to include** and **what to leave out**. Furthermore, the note-taker has to take ownership of those ideas, connecting them with what she or he already knows, in order to find a personal way to express them.

Reading to learn is made more effective by **efficient note-taking**. The process of taking notes extends the memory: it results in material that can be used as an aide-memoire in the short term or can support revision in the future.

Skills needed for taking notes

Note-taking is not a single skill - it is a mix of different skills. The approach used will vary depending on the task. For example, notes used to help write an essay may be very different in content and form from notes that will be used to help with revision.

Note-taking to help learning involves close reading and comprehension, making sense of what has been said or written. Note-takers must be able to identify main ideas, supporting detail and key words.

Note-taking also demands a range of thinking skills: evaluation, synthesis, analysis and application. Note-takers must make judgements about the validity and relevance of what is being said.

- they must be able to distinguish between key ideas and supporting ideas
- they must be able to make connections between ideas, identifying similarities and differences
- they must be able to identify how the writer has arrived at her/his position or view
- they must be able to make connections between what the writer is saying and what they already know

When writing, note-takers must be able to transform the detail of the original to a more concise form. This will involve the selection and omission of content, using the note-taker's language and abbreviations instead of the text writer's language. It may even involve the substitution of the original language for visual or diagrammatic representations.

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WHY?

- Stops the mind wandering and focuses attention
- Forces the reader to make sense of the text
- Encourages the reader to reflect upon the ideas in the text
- Extends the memory
- Acts as a brief aide-memoire (revision note)

SKILLS?

- Close reading/listening
- Making sense of the original text
- Working out what is useful and relevant
- Identifying relationships between ideas
- Understanding how the writer has arrived at the key ideas
- Critically reflecting on the validity of the ideas in the text
- Selecting ideas appropriate for the purpose of the task
- Transforming the language of the original into a form which is meaningful for the reader
- Abbreviating language to produce a concise summary