

Reading: Note-Making (Part I)

There is no specific 'right' way to make notes; however, some things are worth thinking about that will help you improve the quality and usefulness of the notes you make when reading. Some of the ways we makes notes are also quite *unhelpful*. Our notes are often too long or too disjointed. They do not contain all the information we need for our essays/exams or they are just large copied blocks of text. This resource will give you some advice on how to develop your note-making.

In this resource, we concentrate on note-making while reading, but many of the techniques and suggestions will also help you when making notes in lectures or seminars.

In conjunction with this resource, you should also take a look at *Reading Purposes*.

Notice how we use the term *note-making* and not *note-taking*. This is because note-making implies doing something active and creative. Note-taking implies doing something passive, without thinking about what you are doing.

Why are you making notes?

If you have read the *Reading Purposes* resource, you will know by now that there should always be a purpose to your reading. What notes you make will depend on **why** you are reading a text and what information you are looking for.

Generally speaking, there are two main reasons why you should make good notes:

- 1) To keep a record of what you have read so that you can come back to your notes later rather than having to read the book again.
- 2) To help you process and understand what you have read.

Sometimes when you read, you may only be doing so for reason number 1. This is common when you first start learning a topic and all the information is new to you. Most students will know that this is a good reason for note-making.

Reason number 2 is **very** important, though, to help develop your critical thinking. As your knowledge develops, you should be making more and more notes for Reason 2. Your notes should not only record information, but record your **thinking** and your ideas. Not many students think about reason number 2 as much as reason number 1.

Below is a list of different ways in which we make notes. Look at each one carefully and say if it helps you (1) to keep a record of what you have read or (2) to help you process and understand it or (3) both?

	1	2	3 (Both)
Writing down what you do not understand.			
Noting key words/terms.			
Making note of the author's argument/idea/theory.			
Writing down the pros and cons of an argument/idea/theory			
Noting how the text relates to other reading.			
Writing down basic factual information such as names, dates, equations and formulas.			
Writing down what you think about something.			

IMPORTANT ANTI-PLAGIARISM TIP!

Whether you make notes for Reason 1 or for Reason 2, remember to put the surname of the author and the date of your source at the top of your notes. Then for each note you make, just jot down the page number next to it. This will save you ENDLESS time when you are putting in your references and will help you to avoid plagiarism.

How to make notes

There are different ways to make notes, so the important thing is to think about what you are trying to achieve – do you need to remember facts and information? Are you trying to understand an argument or theory? Whatever you are trying to achieve, there are some ways of making notes that you may find helpful and some ways that are not so helpful.

Helpful

- Read a passage, paragraph or page first without writing anything. Then try to summarise it in your own words. Imagine that you are explaining it to a friend. This will prevent you from simply copying the text and will test how well you understand what you have just read.
- Write down any questions or thoughts you have about the reading.
- Make a note to yourself when you do not understand something.
- Use abbreviations to quicken your note-making when there are several long and/or technical terms in your reading. But remember what your abbreviations stand for!
- Draw a picture or diagram to represent what you've read – this is particularly helpful when you are revising for exams.

Not Helpful

- Copying out large passages of text.
- Highlighting everything you do not understand or do not think important.
- Forgetting to make a note of page numbers or bibliographical information.

Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism can be committed on purpose (like paying somebody else to write your essay), but usually it is by accident (you simply forget to reference properly). Whether plagiarism is done on purpose or accidentally, it is *still* plagiarism and there are strict penalties for it.

Good note-making techniques will help you to avoid plagiarising by accident.

To avoid plagiarising, make sure that whenever you copy a string of more than five of another writer's **exact words** from a book/article/website, you use quotation marks ("....."). Make sure you write down *where* this quotation was taken from, including which page (if a book, journal or document) and *when* you wrote down the quotation (if you took it from a website).

Making notes in your own words and not copying text (except quotations or short sentences) will help you to avoid any accidental plagiarism.

Now click on the link to find different *styles* of note-making.