

NOTE TAKING WHILE READING

Academic Reading – Note taking

We are passive readers when we read magazines, newspapers or novels for pleasure. Meaning we are not worrying about concepts like main ideas, key words, paraphrasing or summarizing.

But when it comes to formal reading, such as academic texts, articles, books, journals and researches among others our brains immediately switch and we become active readers, meaning that while we read we are constantly trying to understand, analyze, and interpret large amounts of information.

To do this correctly, we must learn how to take notes effectively. Practising this skill will help us retain, analyze and actually learn from what we read.

EFFECTIVE TIPS TO TAKE NOTES

- 1. USE YOUR OWN WORDS.**
Never copy from someone else notes. If you do it is very unlikely that you learn, and especially unlikely for your brain to retain that information.
- 2. USE PEN AND PAPER**
Take actual written notes with pen and paper. Not on your phone, and ipad or a computer. The effort of writing will help you retain information.
- 3. USE ABBREVIATIONS**
Use abbreviations to save time, especially words that are constantly repeated. But make sure you understand them afterwards.
- 4. HIGHLIGHT MAIN IDEAS**
Highlight main ideas and key words; additional to the notes not instead of notes, highlighting is not enough.
- 5. USE DIFFERENT COLORS**

Use colored paper or colored pens to separate different themes or ideas. You can create your own color coding system, using maybe one color per area, for example one color only used to highlight quotes (check #11).

6. ESTABLISH A FREQUENCY TO TAKE NOTES.

Establish a frequency to take notes, depending of course on what your reading and the length of it; every paragraph, page, chapter, five chapters, 10 pages?

7. SUMMARIZE AND PARAPHRASE

Once you establish a frequency to take notes, write a short summary at the end of each “section” (page, chapter, five chapters, 10 pages). The point of a summary is to bring together the main points, simplify the main viewpoint of the author and cut out any extra information. Paraphrase and summarize what you read in short sentences. Saying the same thing in different and shorter ways is an especially good idea to make sure you actually understood what you read.

8. CREATE A CONCEPT MAP

Write every main idea you find on a sticky note, then make a concept map with all the sticky notes. Remember main ideas or key words are content, relevant and essential words to the text.

9. READ FIRST AND LAST SENTENCES ALWAYS

Always read the first and the last sentence of every paragraph in detail. These usually contain main ideas.

10. BE ORGANIZED WITH YOUR NOTES

Have a specific place destined for you to take notes. It could be a notebook made of recycled paper used only on one side for example, a binder, a folder (hard copy or digital) but not random, lonely pieces of paper. You will very likely lose those or not know the order of them.

11. HIGHLIGHT AND KEEP QUOTES SEPARATE

Have only one color of your highlighters destined for quotes. When you find a quote or complete sentence in the text that you want to copy, highlight it. Have a place (a separate folder, notebook, section in the binder) to copy quotations or sentences you want to transcribe completely. Don't forget to write where the quote came from.

12. KEEP UNKNOWN WORDS SEPARATE

Have a place (a separate folder, notebook, section in the binder) to write down every unknown word or phrase you come across with and once you do, continue reading. When you are finished with your reading session, check your list of words in linguee.com and write a description or an example, not a definition. This encourages learning and not memorizing.

13. KEEP RECORD OF YOUR SOURCES

Always keep a record of your sources. That way, you can easily find information again in the future. In academia it is essential to reference your work. At the start of your notes write the full reference the source that you will be taking notes from.¹

When referring to a book, record the author's name, the date of publication, the title of the book, the relevant page number, the name of the publisher and the place of publication.

When referring to a magazine or newspaper, record the name of the author of the article, the date of publication, the name of the article, the name of the publication, the publication number and page number.

When referring to Internet sources, record (at least) the full URL or web address and the date you accessed the information.²

14. GO OVER YOUR NOTES

Re read your notes at least three times after you wrote them. This way your brain will retain more of that information and they will be familiar to you when you check them after sometime.

15. BE PATIENT

Finally, remember, if it takes you longer than you thought to do both, reading and taking notes, be patient. Don't give up. Effective skills improve with patience and practice.

¹ Source: <https://www.skillsyouneed.com/write/notes-reading.html>

² Source: <https://www.skillsyouneed.com/write/notes-reading.html>