

Note-making from Written Text



As a tertiary student, it is essential to develop effective note-making skills to ensure that you get the most out of the time that you spend reading. Good note-making can help organise your ideas and keep you focused on your reading. It can also help you keep a record of your reading and help you locate information. There is nothing worse than having to spend time tracking down information that you have previously read and now require for an assignment!

Jotting down notes on a reading in the margins and/or highlighting important sections can help you to better understand a text to some extent. However, as your reading requirements become more extensive, it is well worth your while to spend time to write effective notes that will save you time down the research/writing track.

How to Organise Effective Notes for Academic Writing

The following split-page method may be a useful way to help you organise your notes and assist you to develop some of the above skills that are so essential for successful academic study.

Bibliographic Details

Make sure that you note down the appropriate bibliographic details.

They may include the author's surname and initial, the title of book/ article, the title of the journal, the publisher, the place of publication, the page numbers of the article, internet site details, including the web address etc. It is also a good idea to include the library call number so that you can easily relocate the text. You never know when you have to review parts of the text again.

Page Layout

Divide your page into **3 columns**. The **first column** should be for your notes based on the reading. This section may include paraphrased information from the original text, (paraphrasing means to rewrite somebody else's ideas in your own words); or direct quotes. Ultimately, most of your note-making should paraphrase or summarise the key ideas of the author(s). Use direct quotes sparingly in assignments and only in situations where they seem to be the most appropriate way of expressing something.

The **second column** is used for the page number on which you have found a particular piece of information. This is essential for two reasons. Firstly, when directly quoting you must acknowledge the page number(s) on which you located information. Secondly, if you need to clarify your notes, you need to be able to quickly locate the information.

The **third column**, which is vital in effective note-making, is used for your comments on the text. Your comments are important because this is where you relate what you are reading to the various ideas that you are trying to develop, you acknowledge similarities and differences with other authors, or you identify where your knowledge needs further developing. This is the section that encourages you to think *critically* about your text, to question what the author is saying and to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the author's ideas. It is where you start making links between the various authors that you have read as well as to consider where and how your ideas are positioned in the research, and how they may be validated or questioned.

Good notes can help you to:

- think critically about what you are reading
- help you analyse a text
- help you engage with the text (that is, stop your mind from wandering)
- enable you to draw links to other research
- enable you to draw conclusions from the research
- highlight areas that you need to develop further

