

NOTE-TAKING

READING ACADEMIC INFORMATION

This document aims to help you identify the most important, but also relevant ideas when reading academic literature.

If you start at the beginning of a chapter and read through it right to the end, you will become discouraged. The following steps might help you with this process:

1. **Preview** the chapter.

First, get an *overall* view of what the chapter entails. Usually you will find the main themes in the *table of contents*, the *main headings* and the *summary* at the end of the chapter. You may also look at the study guide. This will not take you more than 5 to 10 minutes.

The *learning outcomes* in the study guide also give you an overview of the work that we are going to cover in this unit. In the *introduction*, at the beginning of every unit, we also give you a preview of the work that follows to help you approach it in the right manner. After completion of the unit you should be able to answer the learning outcomes in the beginning of the unit.

2. Decide what is **important**.

Ask yourself how this unit fits into the *context* of the whole semester's work. Look at the importance of the unit in relation to the rest of the work. What sections does the *facilitator* see as important? What can you *leave out* or only *read through* and what must be *studied*? Mark it in your textbook. Now you know on which parts to concentrate.

3. Get the **main ideas**.

Now, reading through the chapter, you will know which parts to focus on. It is important to note the *main ideas*. If you are going to identify EVERY MAIN FACT you will become discouraged. Rather try to identify *one idea per paragraph*. Sometimes there is more than one main idea per paragraph. This should be indicated, but most of the time you will be able to remember the *secondary facts* if you remember the main idea. Highlight the main idea in your textbook or write it down in the margin of the textbook. Robbins, Odendaal and Roodt (2003) help students by printing important concepts in bold and italic.

4. **Graphs, tables and pictures** are there to **clarify information**.

They will help you to better understand the information! The activities in the study guide have the same function. If I ask you to read additional information, it is to help you understand better. SO DON'T DISREGARD THESE TOOLS!

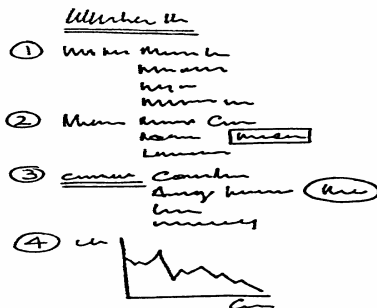
METHODS TO SUMMARISE WORK

Now that you know how to identify the most important work, let's quickly have a look at the different methods that you can use to make notes.

Your notes are supposed to be a summary of the textbook. It will enable you to do revision quickly and give you speedy access to the main ideas. In other words, your notes are a brief summary of the main ideas. The ideal would be to have 10 key words if a question counts 10 marks. You must decide which summary method suits your learning style.

The two main methods that you can use are the following:

*Linear notes



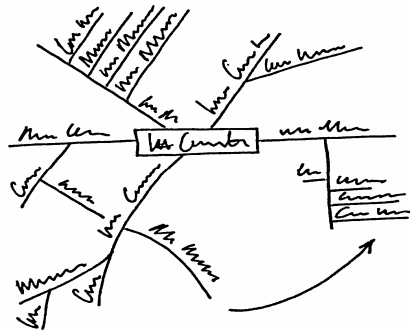
Linear notes may be more effective if they:

- contain key words and phrases
- use clear headings, subheadings, underlining, circles, boxes, diagrams, flow charts and colours
- have margins or are written on every other line so you can return to it as the lecture or video progresses or you get further into the book or other source
- have margins for you to write your own questions, comments or criticisms (done so that in the future you do not mistake your own comments for those of a lecturer or author) (Drew & Bingham, 1996).

* Mind Maps

This method uses arrows and circles to connect the key words/phrases. It produces a spreading pattern in all directions rather than use words which start at the top of the page and progress towards the bottom.

It may look messy but the content can be concise and quick to read. It is also easy and quick to redraw the pattern at a later stage to make it clearer (Drew & Bingham, 1996).



You may want to combine the linear style and mind maps in the same situation, using one piece of paper to draw mind maps and another to note down factual information, lists etc. (Drew & Bingham, 1996). Sometimes, you will find that different parts of the work, will work better with a certain style of note-taking. You do not have to stick to one style.

REVIEW YOUR NOTES

Review your notes soon after you have made them, highlighting things you do not understand. It is easier to act on misunderstandings or omissions while they are fresh in your mind.

How can you find out about things you do not understand? Here are some ideas:

- Other students
- Reference books
- General or subject specific dictionaries
- Your facilitator
- Study guide (Drew & Bingham, 1996).

RETRIEVING NOTES

Will you be able to find your notes again? How will you store them? How will you retrieve the information? Do you order notes by date, alphabetically, numerically, by topic or subject?

Storage method	Possible advantages
Loose-leaf in files or concertina file/folders	Can introduce new divisions, add extra material.
Computerised database	Easy to edit.
Boxed card-file system	Good for an index or references, can be stored easily – e.g. in a card box index; you can write a topic and its location on a card.
A notebook per topic	Keeps relevant material together.

(Drew & Bingham, 1996)