

Essential Student Skills: Taking notes

Introduction

In this section we will look at the importance of taking **notes and** examine some strategies for effective note taking.

Objectives

By the time you have completed this section you should be able to:

- Articulate the reasons for taking good notes
- Employ different note taking strategies



Why should I take notes?

Notes should be an active and creative part of the learning process. Note taking strategies will help you to engage with the materials rather than merely recording information.

Why should you take notes?

- They can summarise information
- They can clarify ideas
- They can help you remember (for some people the act of making notes helps them remember, they do not always have to go back to the notes again)
- They can be a record of what you have learned
- They tell you where information comes from (very important)
- They can help keep you organised and focused
- They can help with exam revision and preparation for assessments

You do not make notes just for the sake of it - you make notes to help you study. You do not make notes in order to put off doing assessments – you make notes in order to help with assessments.

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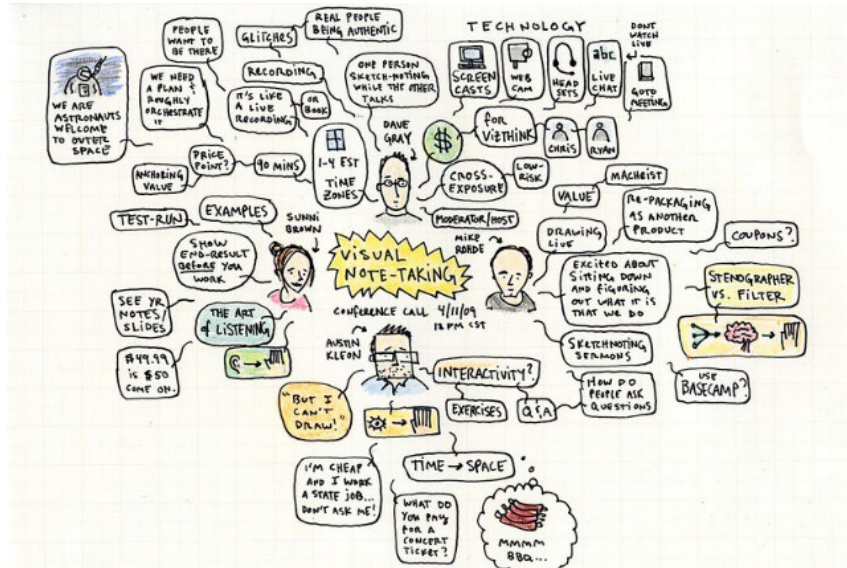
How to take notes

There are many different ways of taking notes. Some methods of note taking are more suited to particular learning styles.

Vary your technique

Different techniques can be useful for different situations.

For example, you could use a mind map to record the main points of a lecture; make pencil notes in the margins of your course books to refer back to; make linear notes to plan essays; and make chart notes to take notes from a library book.



'Taking notes' by Jacob Bøtter from Flickr, used under an [Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 2.0 Generic license](#).

You can find out more about these different techniques in the rest of this section.

Linear notes

How to take linear notes:

- Write the title topic or question at the top of the page
- Divide your notes into headings representing each topic or subtopic. Number each section and subsection
- Leave a space between each section so that you can add more notes later; when you are revising, for example
- Leave a left-hand margin so you can put in notes and key words for each section
- Use colour to separate different parts of your notes e.g. write your own thoughts in one colour, quotes in another and facts in a third
- Link up related points by drawing coloured boxes round them, or link sentences with coloured arrows or dotted lines

Causes of World War 1	
<u>1. Militarism</u>	(a) Arms race (b) Dreadnought
<u>2. Imperialism</u>	(a) British and French Empires (b) German struggle for colonies
<u>3. Alliances</u>	(a) Austro-Serbian (b) Franco-Russian
<u>4. Crises</u>	(a) Bosnian (b) Moroccan
<u>5. Nationalism</u>	(a) Congress of Vienna (b) Serbian nationalism

Linear notes example

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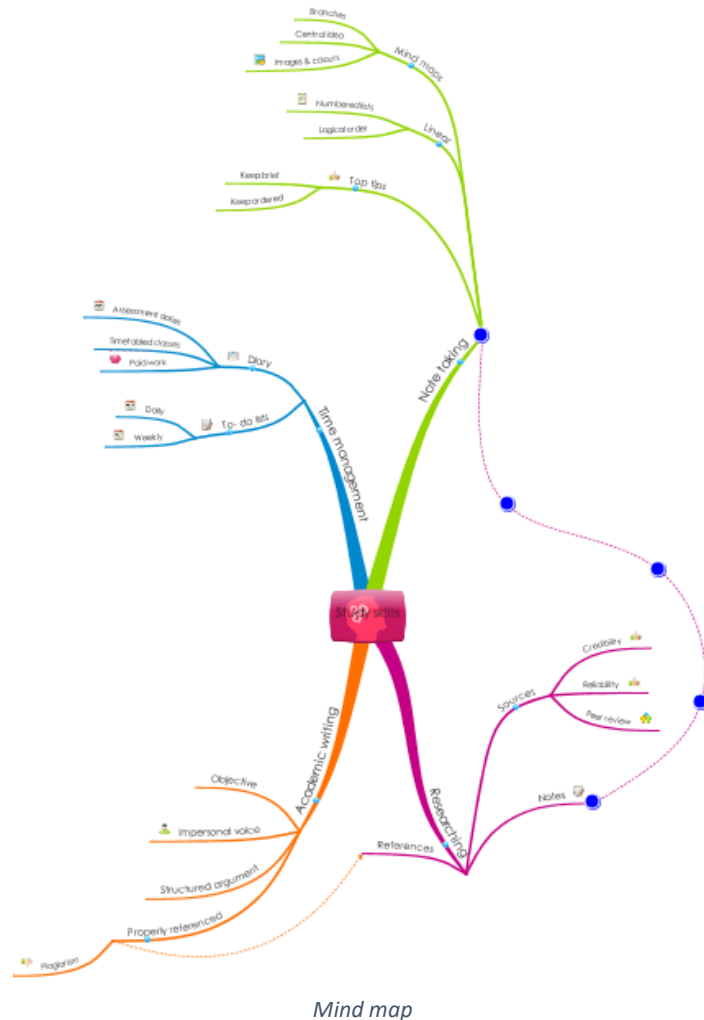
Mind maps

Mind maps, also known as pattern notes represent the relations between ideas visually in a map or diagram. The main idea sits at the centre with other ideas branching off like the branches of a tree. Words and images are used to label the branches and subbranches.

Mind maps are useful for remembering lots of pieces of related information; because your brain works by association, if you connect the branches, you will understand and remember a lot better. This method of note taking is often preferred by students who have a visual learning style (You can find out your learning style in the Understanding your learning style section)

How to create a mind map:

- Use a blank sheet of paper and draw a picture in the centre of the page that represents your main topic.
- Draw some thick, curved, connecting lines coming away from the central image
- From each of these lines, draw other connecting lines, spreading out like the branches of a tree
- Label each branch; use one key word per line - single words give your mind more flexibility and are better at sparking off new ideas than phrases.
- Add colours and images to your branches - colour is exciting for the brain
- Represent connections between the different branches of your mind map using arrows or dotted lines



Free mind mapping software

Free mind mapping software is available from [xmind](http://xmind.com).

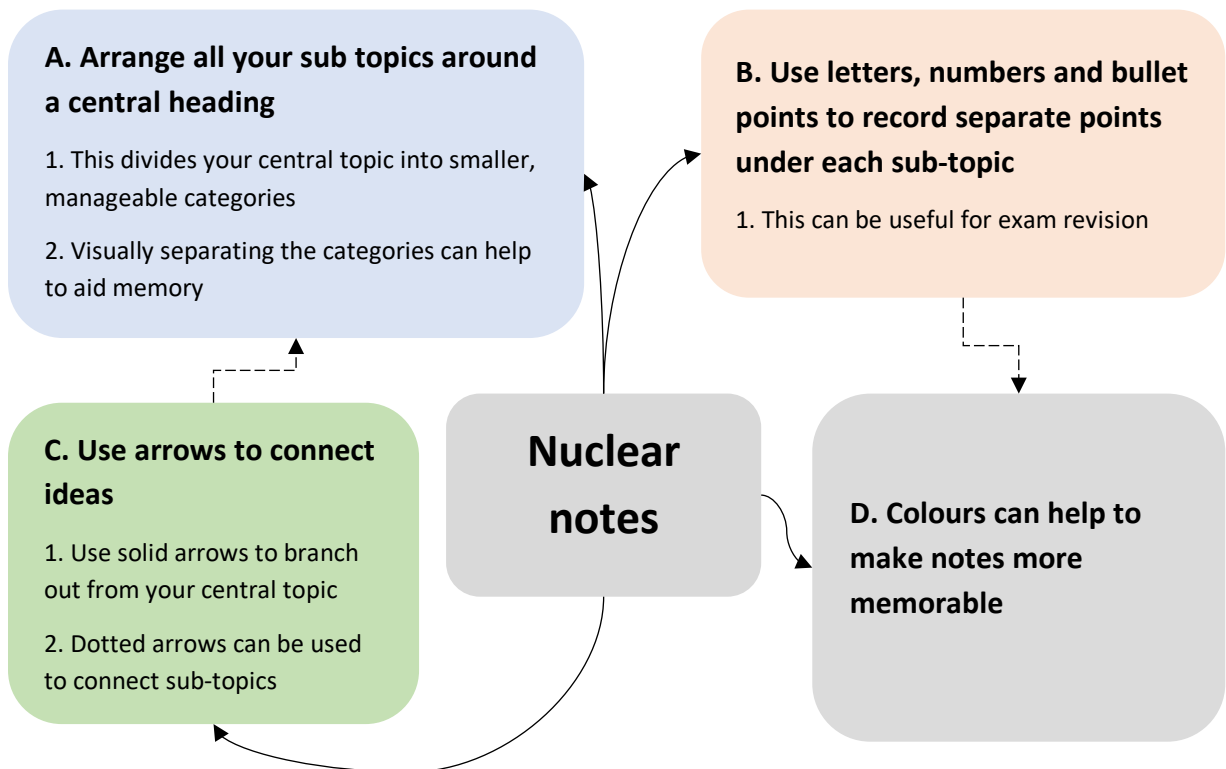
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Nuclear notes

Nuclear notes are a hybrid of pattern and linear notes. Topics are listed in boxes radiating out from a central theme. Colours and arrows can be used to highlight and connect different ideas.

How to make nuclear notes:

As the picture opposite suggests, nuclear notes begin by dividing a central topic into sub-topics; from there each point under a sub-topic is separated out by letters, number, or shapes. As concepts and points in different sub-topics may be related, in nuclear notes you use lines and arrows to connect ideas. Finally, consider using colours - again to keep things distinct but also as a way of showing connections that aren't immediately obvious.



Nuclear notes

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Chart notes

Chart notes use a chart or table structure to organise notes into thematic columns. Chart notes are useful in situations like lectures when you know in advance which topics will be covered. Chart notes are also easy to review and make a good revision tool.

How to make chart notes:

- Write your topic at the top of the page
- Divide your page into columns to represent each subtopic
- Write theme headings at the beginning of each row
- Fill in the boxes

Lecture on renewable energy			
	Solar	Wind	Hydro
Description	Conversion of sunlight into electricity, usually using photovoltaic panels	Use of wind turbines or windmills to make electrical power	Production of electrical power through the use of the gravitational force of falling or flowing water
Positives	Cheap to install Low running cost	High efficiency Low running cost	Very high efficiency Reliable
Negatives	Low efficiency Unreliable (because of reliance on weather)	High installation cost Unattractive Risk to wildlife	High installation cost High running cost Unattractive
Applications	Domestic and commercial/ industrial	Domestic and commercial/ industrial	Commercial/ industrial only

Practising taking notes

Activity: Practising taking notes

Choose one of the note-taking strategies outlined in this section and try it out on this piece of text. Click below for sample answers.

“(...) (F)eminism is divided into three broad phases. First Wave feminism, from about 1848 to 1918, focused on getting women rights in public spheres, especially the vote, education and entry to middle-class jobs such as medicine. The views of these feminists, at least as they expressed them in public, were puritan about sex, alcohol, dress and behaviour. The Second Wave, from 1918 to 1968, was concerned with social reform (such as free school meals for poor children, and health care for poor women) and ‘revolution’ in

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the private sphere: the right to contraception, the end of the sexual double standard and so on. Third Wave feminism from 1968 to the present has been concerned with public issues again (equal pay, an end to sex discrimination in employment, pensions, mortgages etc.) and with making formerly private issues (such as rape and domestic violence) matters of public concern and reform.” (Delamont 2003: 2)

Reveal 1: Sample linear notes

Phases of feminism

1. First Wave (1848-1918)

(a) Social reform in the public sphere

- i. Vote*
- ii. Education*
- iii. Entry to jobs*

(b) Puritan views about sex, dress, alcohol, behaviour

2. Second Wave (1918-1968)

(a) Social reform in the public sphere

- i. Free school meals*
- ii. Health care for women*

(b) 'Revolution' in private sphere

- i. Right to contraception*
- ii. End to sexual double standards*

3. Third Wave (1968-present)

(a) Social reform

- a. Equal pay*
- b. Employment discrimination*
- c. Financial equality*

(b) Move private issues into the public sphere

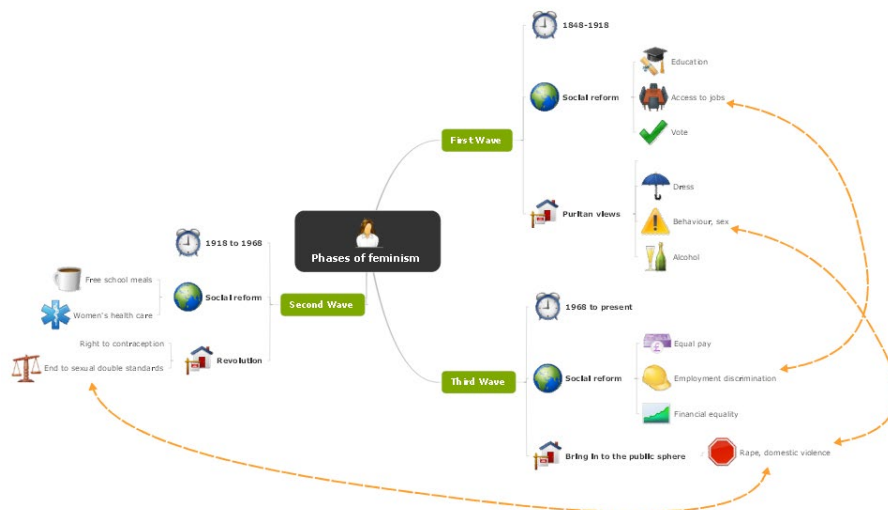
- a. Rape*
- b. Domestic violence*

Reveal 2: Sample chart notes

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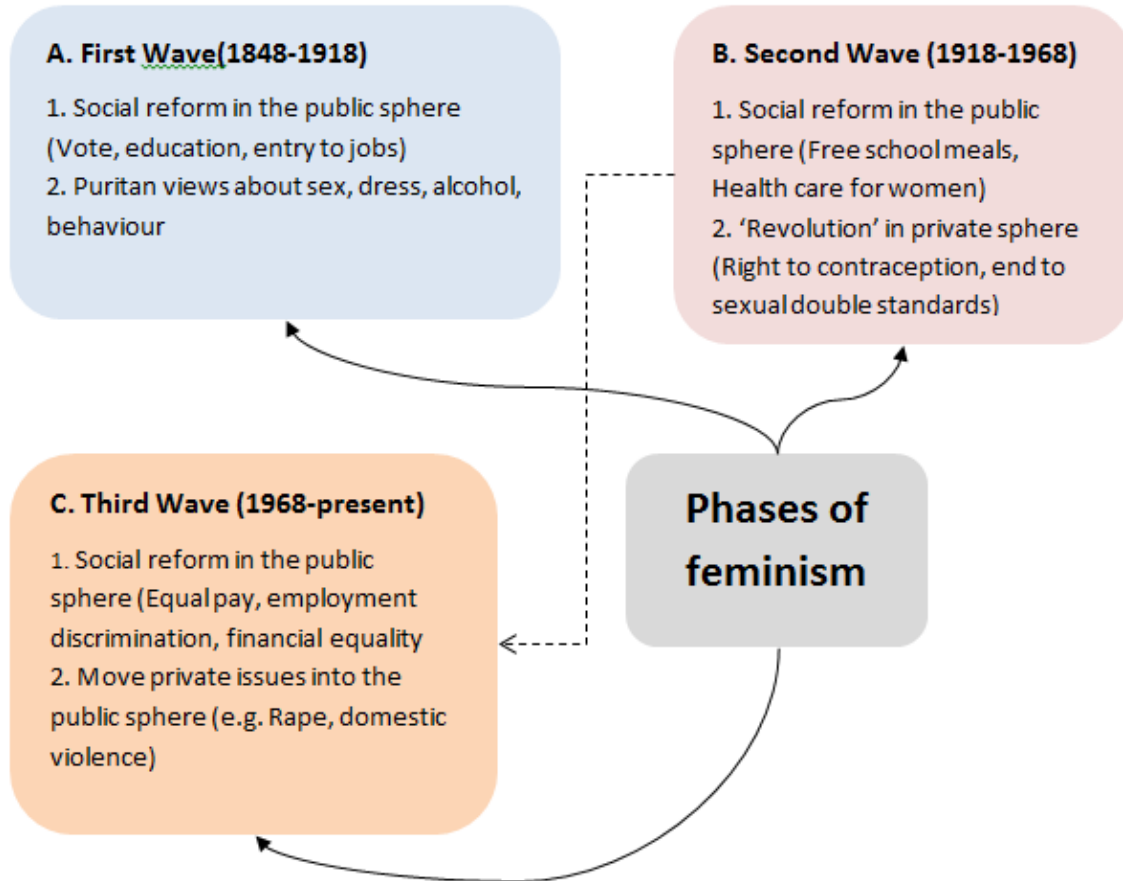
<i>Phases of feminism</i>			
<i>Name</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Public sphere</i>	<i>Private sphere</i>
<i>First Wave</i>	<i>1848-1918</i>	<i>Vote</i> <i>Education</i> <i>Entry to jobs</i>	<i>Puritan views</i> <i>about sex,</i> <i>dress, alcohol,</i> <i>behaviour</i>
<i>Second Wave</i>	<i>1918-1968</i>	<i>Social reform</i>	<i>'Revolution'</i> <i>(contraception,</i> <i>end to double</i> <i>standards)</i>
<i>Third Wave</i>	<i>1968-present</i>	<i>Equal pay</i> <i>Employment</i> <i>discrimination</i> <i>Financial</i>	<i>Move issues</i> <i>into the public</i> <i>sphere (e.g.</i> <i>rape, domestic</i> <i>violence)</i>

Sample 3: Sample mind map



Sample 4: Nuclear notes

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Taking good notes

Good notes feature at least 4 things (see if you can think of some other qualities of good notes):

Organised

1. Organise notes under headings, numbers or keywords.
2. Colour code your notes by, for example, writing quotes in one colour, your own thoughts in another and key words or phrases in a third.
3. Leave space in the margin to add more notes later, such as when you are revising or preparing for an assignment.

Brief

1. Avoid copying long sentences.
2. Use abbreviations and write in phrases rather than full sentences.
3. Focus on writing down only key points.

Memorable and personal

1. Write things in your own words as this make it more likely that you'll remember and understand what you've written.
2. Link up related points by using arrows and lines, numbering them or putting them in boxes.

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3. Use colour and illustrations to bring your notes to life.
4. Find a note taking method that works for you, or adapt one, or make up your own.

Used as the basis for further study

1. Revisit your notes as soon as you can so that you don't forget things.
2. Take some time to reflect upon them, order them, identify any gaps in your understanding and any questions or reading you need to follow up.
3. Enhance your notes by using colour-coding to link pieces of information, highlighting or underlining key ideas and drawing round sections of your notes to make them stand out.

Conclusion

This section has highlighted the importance of note taking and introduced you to the main note taking strategies. Good note taking skills are a valuable asset; they can make you a more effective student and save you time in the long run. It is worth trying to develop these skills straight away. Even if you are supplied with handouts in the early stages of your course, do take the time to write your own notes and you will find that your knowledge and understanding develops more quickly.

References

Delamont, S. (2003) *Feminist Sociology*. London: SAGE Publication