

When engaged in some form of study or research, either informally, for general interest, or formally, while in education or at work, you will no doubt need to read information, and potentially lots of information. This page describes how to take effective notes while reading, as a way to engage with the printed word, summarise and aid the learning process.

### Taking Notes when Reading

Reading for pleasure or as a way to relax, like when reading a novel, newspaper or magazine is usually a 'passive' exercise. When you are studying reading should be seen as an 'active' exercise, in other words you engage with your reading to maximise your learning. One of the most effective ways of actively engaging with your reading is to make notes as you go along – linking points, pulling out key snippets of information etc. By writing notes, in your own words, you will be forced to think about the ideas that are presented in the text and how you can explain them coherently. The process of note-taking will, therefore, help you retain, analyse and ultimately remember and learn what you have read.

### What NOT To Do

**It is important to understand that effective note-taking means writing notes on what you have read in your own words.**

Copying what others have said is not note-taking and is only appropriate when you want to directly quote an author. It can be tempting, especially if your reading material is online, to copy and paste straight into a document. If you do this then you are unlikely to learn what you have read, as copying is not engaging with the text. Also, and especially if you are a student, copied text that ends up in an assignment is plagiarism - a serious academic offence.

**Use online sources as appropriate but summarise, re-write and/or paraphrase and always reference.**

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### Effective Steps for Note-Taking

There is no magic formula to taking notes when reading, you have to find out what works best for you. Your note-taking skills will develop with practice and as you realise the benefits. Our tips for effective note-taking, below, should help you get started.

### Highlighting and Emphasising

A quick and easy way to be active when reading is to highlight and/or underline parts of the text. Although the process of highlighting is not 'note-taking' it is often an important first step. Of course, this is not a good idea if the book or journal does not belong to you! In such cases make notes on a photocopy or use sticky 'post it' notes or similar.

### Highlighting key words or phrases in text will help you:

- Focus your attention on what you are reading – and make it easy to see key points when re-reading.
- Think more carefully about what the key concepts and ideas in the text are, the bits that are worth highlighting.
- At a glance you will be able to see that you have already read pages or sections on text.

**When you come across words or phrases that you are not familiar with it may be useful to add them to a personal glossary of terms.** Make a glossary on a separate sheet (or document) of notes, so you can easily refer and update it as necessary. Write descriptions of the terms in your own words to further encourage learning.

### Making Written Notes

**Although highlighting is a quick way of emphasising key points, it is no substitute for taking proper notes.**

Remember your main purpose for note-taking is to learn, and probably to prepare for some form of writing. When you first start out note-taking you may find that you take too many notes, or not enough, or that when you revisit them they are unclear, or which is your opinion and which is the opinion of the author. You will need to work on these areas - like all life skills, taking effective notes improves with practice.

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## **Tips for Making Effective Notes**

**The following guidelines may be of help:**

- It is important to keep your notes organised and well-structured, so you can easily find them later. Use a notebook or set up folders on your computer - keep your notes in good order.
- Use headings or different sheets (or documents) to separate different themes and ideas.
- Use bright colours to highlight important points in your notes. You may find it useful to have a simple system of colour coding, using different colours for related areas.
- **Always** keep a record of your information source, this is generally good practice – so you can easily find information again in the future. In academia it is essential to reference your work.
  - **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.