

Bureau for Student Counselling & Career Development
Study skills pamphlets

Notemaking

Why make notes?

Because you need an information storage system.

What difference does it make?

You understand the topic in more depth.

Distance learners do not attend classes to listen to lectures; they sit at home and read from their study guides. The study guide accompanies the textbook from which students master the course. Study reading is not enough. Successful students make notes of what they have read. The notes serve two major purposes. Firstly, notes act as a permanent record of the time you have spent on a section of the work. Secondly, notes serve as the first step in expanding your network of memory strategies. Note making is the link between study reading and answering assignment questions.

When you are learning new material you have to ensure that the material is processed (encoded in your memory) in such a manner that you understand and recall it. New information is best processed if you reorganise it to suit your style of learning. The best way of processing information is to make notes. Visual notes and linear notes are the two major styles of note making. Broadly speaking, if you have an imaginative learning style, a creative, visual approach to note making should appeal to you. If your learning style is more factual, you might prefer the tidier, step-by-step, narrative approach to making notes.

Two approaches to note-making

- Visual note making methods refer to mind maps, spider grams, branching notes, cluster grams, tables, flow charts and organograms.
- Narrative note making methods refer to linear notes, listing, time line notes, key word and paragraph method, question method and segmenting and labelling.

Applications of the different methods

How do you decide which is the best method to apply? Students make notes differently, but they all manage to prepare adequately for their assignments and the exam. The most important thing to remember is to start reorganising the information to suit yourself.

Your choice depends on a number of issues, such as what time of the year is it (the beginning equals an overview to establish a frame of reference; or exam preparation equals detail to consolidate the knowledge base), your estimate of the nature of the study task (is it complex; unfamiliar; or entails many pages of learning), your learning style (do you start with an

overall idea or do you prefer a step-by-step approach). The following contains some suggestions you might want to experiment with. Starting a course means that a useful point of departure is the extraction of an overall idea of what the content is about. A mind map, cluster gram or organogram could be considered, and is based on the list of content as well as chapter headings and subheadings to master the overview.

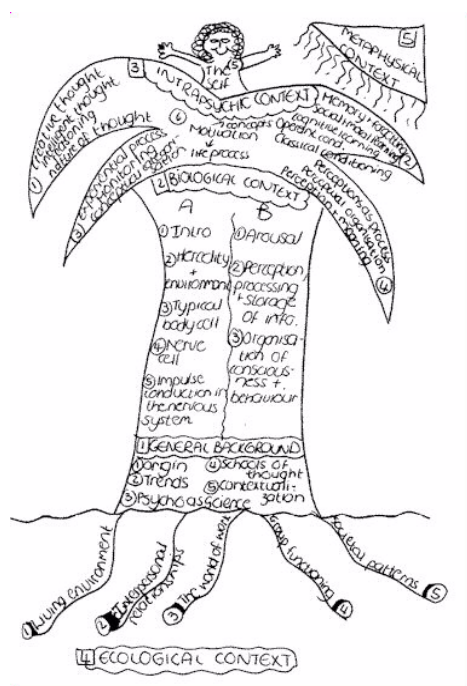
When you are faced with a chapter or section, you could use one of the narrative methods such as segmenting and labelling, key word and paragraph method or question method to master a closer understanding of the textbook or study guide. If you first applied one of the visual note making methods, the structure of the course or the particular chapter should now be fixed in your memory. Keeping the structure in mind as you read through the chapter, and then narrative making notes, helps to change the feeling of unfamiliarity to one of knowing. You should be experiencing the "AH HA" feeling: "now I see how it fits together!"

Using both visual and narrative methods of making notes ensure that you do not get bored and drowsy while studying. Because you are using the methods interchangeably, you are able to maintain your concentration. By actively searching for meaning (your own understanding), recalling the information becomes easier. Mixing different note making methods to master your course material is the characteristic of a study-wise student. Irrespective of your preferred style (visual or narrative) the challenge of note making is centred on your ability to experiment with various approaches to study tasks and to find the most effective matches.

Sources

Buzan, T. & Buzan B. (1995) The mind map book. London: BBC Books. 320p.
 Deem, J. (1993) Study skills in practice. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 418p.
 Russell, P. (1979) The brain book. Know your mind and how to use it. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 270p

Mind mapping to overview



Example of a visual note making method: mind map

Steps to follow

- Step 1: Start with a central image - use the list of content. It is the shortest summary of the book.
- Step 2: Add key words/ phrases to the central image (section and chapter headings).
- Step 3: If you need more key words/ phrases, use the headings and subheadings of each chapter. You have now established a frame of reference (an understanding of how different sections, chapters and their subsections relate to each other).
- Step 4: Use the mind map as a self test. Put away your books and notes. Take a clean sheet of paper and from memory

reproduce what you have just mind mapped. Compare it to your first effort.

Source

Buzan, T. & Buzan B. (1995) The mind map book. London: BBC Books. 320p.

Question system - to control detail

STUDY OBJECTIVES TURNED INTO QUESTIONS	NOTES - answer to questions
How does ROGERS describe the structure of the personality?	<p>① ORGANISM - physical + psychological individual - interacts with changing environment - behaviour determined by subjective evaluation of world.</p> <p>② PHENOMENAL FIELD - total perceptions of self and experiences - consists of internal + external observation of events/experiences</p> <p>③ SELF-CONCEPT - what person thinks of himself - IDEAL SELF = ideal self-concept - psycho. healthy person: realistic self concept</p>
How does ROGERS describe the development of personality?	<p>self-concept develops gradually - dev. takes place because of interaction with environment and others' evaluation of you.</p>
* NOTE: How is structure different from development of personality: (own question)	<p>structure => what individual consists of development => how structure evolves.</p>

Example of a narrative note making method: question system

Steps to follow

Step 1:

Split the page into two: left hand column (a third of the page) and the right hand column (two thirds of the page).

Step 2:

Left hand column: turn the study objectives into questions- your notes in the right hand column will answer the questions on the left.

Step 3:

Right hand column: make your notes as you work through the study guide and text book, as answers to the questions posed.

Step 4:

You may add more questions and answer them in the right

hand column. To revise for exam purpose, block the notes and see whether you are able to answer the questions by talking aloud or writing them down.

Source

Deem, J. (1993) Study skills in practice. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 418p.

Further NOTEMAKING resources on the Internet

- Concept mapping (mindtools.com)
<http://www.mindtools.com/mindmaps.html>
- The Art of Notetaking (Capital Community-Technical College, Hartford, Connecticut)
<http://webster.comnet.edu/faculty/~simonds/notes.htm>
- Notemaking (Northern Territory University)
http://www.learnline.ntu.edu.au/studyskills/nm/nm_nl.html
- Mind maps (Peter Russel)
<http://www.peterussell.com/mindmap1.html>
- Notetaking video (Dartmouth College)
http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/success/video_nt.html

This document is available on-line at: <https://sol.unisa.ac.za/counselling/>.

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