



Reading Note Taking Strategies

To get the most out of the time that you spend reading, it is essential to develop effective note-making skills.

Jotting down notes on a reading in the margins and/or highlighting important sections can help you to focus and better understand what you read. However, as your reading becomes more extensive and purposeful, writing effective notes will save you valuable researching and writing time. Good note-making can help you to keep a record of what you read and record your thoughts about it while they are fresh.

Good notes can help you to:

- organise your ideas
- keep focused while reading
- keep a record of what you read so you can locate it again
- keep a record of what you thought whilst you were reading
- think critically about what you read
- analyse a text
- engage more effectively with what you read
- draw links to other research
- draw conclusions highlight areas that you need to develop further

How to organise effective notes for academic writing

The split-page method can be a useful way to help you organise your notes, record and collect information, and develop your thinking about what you read.

Page Layout

At the top of the page: bibliographic information

Note down the bibliographic details of the source you are taking notes from at the top of each page. Include the surname and initial of the author or editor, the title of the book, article or source, the title of the journal, the publisher, the place of publication, the page numbers of the article, website details, including the URL. Also include any library catalogue item numbers so that you can easily relocate the source if you need to. If you are focusing on a particular page, include the page number.

Underneath the bibliographic information: rule up two columns

Use **the first column** for 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)
- summaries of ideas or information
- quotations (reproducing the exact words of an author)

Ultimately, most of your note-making should paraphrase or summarise the key ideas of the author(s). Use quotations sparingly in assignments and only in situations where they seem to be the most appropriate way to express something. Make sure that you put quotes between quotation marks (“ ”) in order to distinguish between the words of the author and your own words.

Make sure you record:

- the page number(s) on which you found a particular piece of information
- the paragraph number, if it is an online source with no page numbers

This is essential for two reasons. Firstly, you will need to include this information in citations. Secondly, if you need to clarify anything, you also need to be able to quickly locate the original information.

Use **the second column** for your comments on what you read. What you write here will depend on your purpose for reading. Your comments are vital because they can give context—If reading for an assignment, you might focus on how this information relates to the assignment task, or reflect how or where you will use it in the assignment. Your comments may also build on what you have read and noted in the left hand column, reflect how you see this information in relation to your own ideas—or be simple notes clarifying why you thought an idea was useful. You can acknowledge similarities and differences with other authors, or identify questions you have, what you find confusing, or where your knowledge needs further developing. This is the section that encourages you to think critically about the 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.

A template for setting out and writing effective notes from a reading

Remember to use a new page for each new reading.

- [Page template \(PDF\)](#)

<p>Bibliographic Details</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • author’s surname and initial, the title of book / article / page, the title of the journal / website, publisher / sponsor, place of publication, website details, including URL etc., page number(s) <p>It is a good idea to include the library item number.</p>	
<p>Notes</p> <p>Paraphrased notes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paraphrases (i.e. rewriting somebody else’s ideas in your own words) and summaries should form the bulk of the information in this section. <p>Summaries of important information</p> <p>Quotations (use quotation marks “ “)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you reproduce information word for word, make sure you put it between quotation marks (“ “) or write it in a different colour to remind you that it is somebody else’s words copied exactly. <p>Always include page or paragraph numbers to help you cite accurately.</p>	<p>Comments on Information</p> <p>In the comments section, write anything that indicates your response to what you are reading. It is important to record your thoughts about what you read, while you read. Your comments will usually reflect your purpose for reading. The questions included here are a guide only. You don’t have to include a response to every paraphrase or quote but it is important to think about why you are including information and to note down any reasons that seem relevant.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the information relevant to my purpose? (If it isn’t relevant, should I be pursuing it at all?) • How does this information relate to my assignment? • How/ where will I use it in my assignment? How can it help me answer the question/ task? • How does this information relate to other information on the topic? • What links can be made to the topic/ other research? • Does the author say anything new or of particular interest? • Do I have questions? Is there anything that I don’t understand that I need to follow up? • Is the author saying anything that I disagree with? Why do I disagree? • Is the author saying anything that contradicts the findings/opinions of other authors? • What conclusions can I make from the points being made?

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