University of Salford MANCHESTER

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Reading and Note-making

Reading and note making

Contents

Introduction

You will spend a lot of your study time reading about your subject and taking notes from books, lectures, journals and other sources. This is a guide to how to get the most from your reading and notes.

What to read

At University you will read of different types of texts which may include some or all of the following:

1. Text books
2. Journal articles
3. Lecture slides
4. Handouts
5. Conference papers
6. Government publications
7. Guidelines and legislation
8. Reports
9. Reviews
10. Websites
11. Blogs
12. Newspapers

Depending on your subject discipline, some sources may be more appropriate and relevant than others.

Reading lists

Each module that you study will have an associated reading list which has been created by your lecturers. These are sources which the lecturer thinks are important to gain an understanding of the subject and which will help you pass your assessments. They're a good place to start and you can be sure that the sources are appropriate for your studies. However, you will also need to find other sources for yourself. The reading lists are guides as to what is useful, and you will be expected to look beyond these as you get further into your degree.

Reading strategies

Reading for University is different to 'normal' reading for example glancing through a daily newspaper or reading a fictional book which we generally find pretty easy. As you come across new concepts and vocabulary, it may be more challenging so it's useful to have a strategy.

Firstly, don't feel that you have to read everything! No-one expects you to read every recommended book from cover to cover. Smart reading is about being selective. Secondly, building up a vocabulary notebook can help with both reading and writing more effectively, particularly if your subject area has lots of technical or specific words. You may wish to use a digital notebook to store this information so you can look up and add key words on the go.

Setting reading goals

Before you start reading something, think about your purpose and ask yourself the following:

1. What am I going to use the information for?
2. What do I know already?
3. What do I need to know about the topic?
4. What don't I need to know?

This will help you to focus on specific parts of the text and think about how you are going to use the information.

Using the SQ3R technique

Survey

The first step, survey or skim, involves reading quickly to get the gist of the text. For example, with a book, you could glance through a chapter in order to identify headings, sub-headings and other outstanding features such as introductory and concluding paragraphs, bold text, images and their captions, tables and charts. This is in order to identify ideas and formulate questions about the content of the chapter.

Question

Formulate questions about the content of the reading. For example, convert headings and sub-headings into questions, and then look for answers in the content of the text. Other more general questions may also be formulated:

1. What is this chapter about?
2. What question is this chapter trying to answer?
3. How does this information help me?
4. How does this relate to what I already know?

Read (R1)

Use the background work done with "S" and "Q" in order to begin reading actively. This means reading in detail to answer the questions raised under "Q". Read a section at a time and don't worry if you need to re-read parts to fully understand the text.

Recall (R2)

Using key phrases, identify major points and answers to questions from the "Q" step for each section. This may be done either in an oral or written format. It is important to process the information fully and use your own words at this stage so that you creating notes that are meaningful.

Review (R3)

Go back over the questions you created for every heading. See if you can still answer them. If not, look back and refresh your memory and then continue reading. You will find that you remember more of what you have written if you are actively

engaging with your reading and making notes as you go along.

Making notes

Top tips

1. Read a section of text, put the text away, think about what you've read, then make notes. This prevents you from copying the text – instead you really have to think about the main ideas and put them into your **own words**. Check your notes against the text for accuracy.
2. Don't **just** highlight parts of the text. Add your own key words, phrases and questions next to the highlighted bits.
3. Keep a record of your **sources** as you go along (i.e. author's name, title, date, page numbers, publisher and location). This will help you to distinguish between your ideas and those of others in your assignments as well as compiling your reference list.
4. When you're in a lecture don't try to write down everything your lecturer says. It's impossible! Instead listen out for **verbal cues** such as emphasis on a particular phrase,
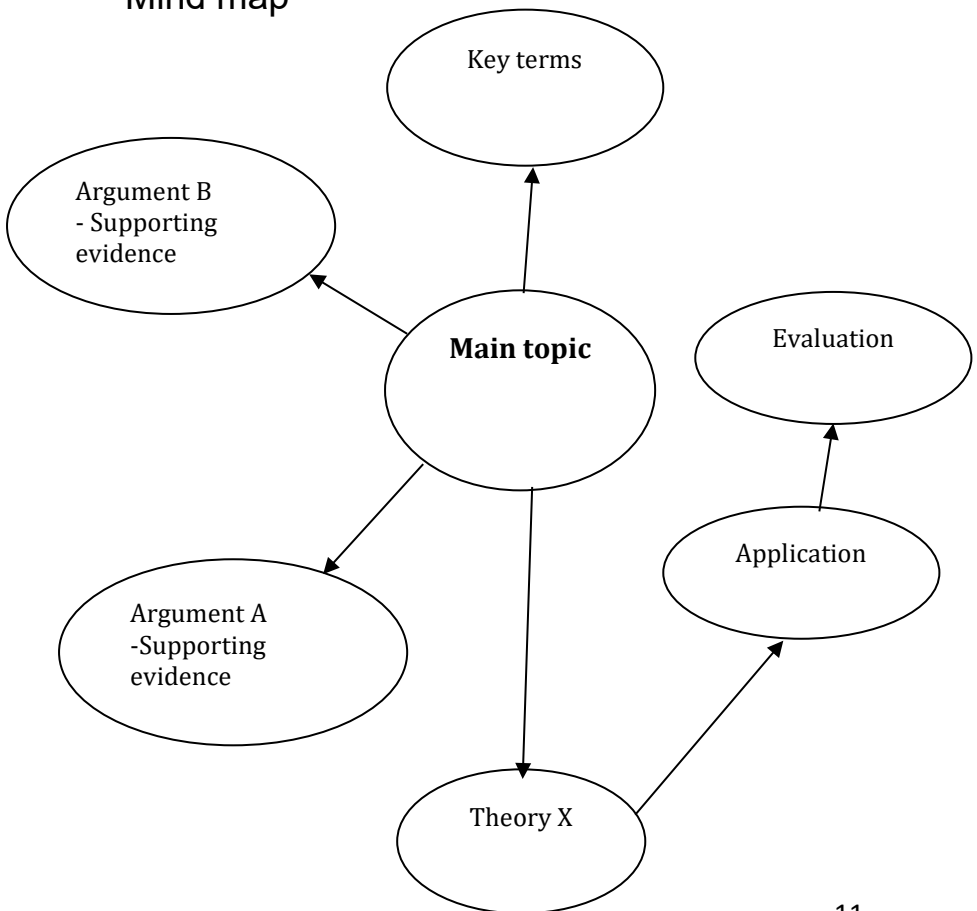
statements such as 'firstly', 'important/significant', 'interestingly…'There may be **visual cues** on the slides or on the handouts such as highlighted phrases, diagrams or use of different coloured text.

5. Use **abbreviations** to make note taking faster. There are lots of existing ones but making up your own allows you to personalise and remember them more easily.

Note taking methods

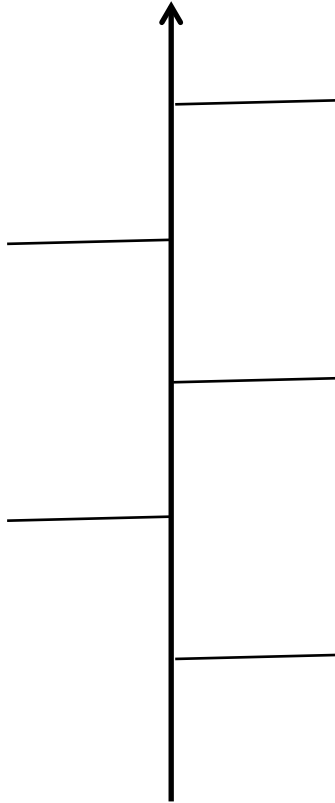There are lots of ways to make notes so you might want to try a few different ones or use them for different situations. Here are some examples:

Mind map

Key terms

Argument B
- Supporting
evidence

Main topic

Evaluation

Application

Argument A
-Supporting
evidence

Theory X

Time line

SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	**Threats**
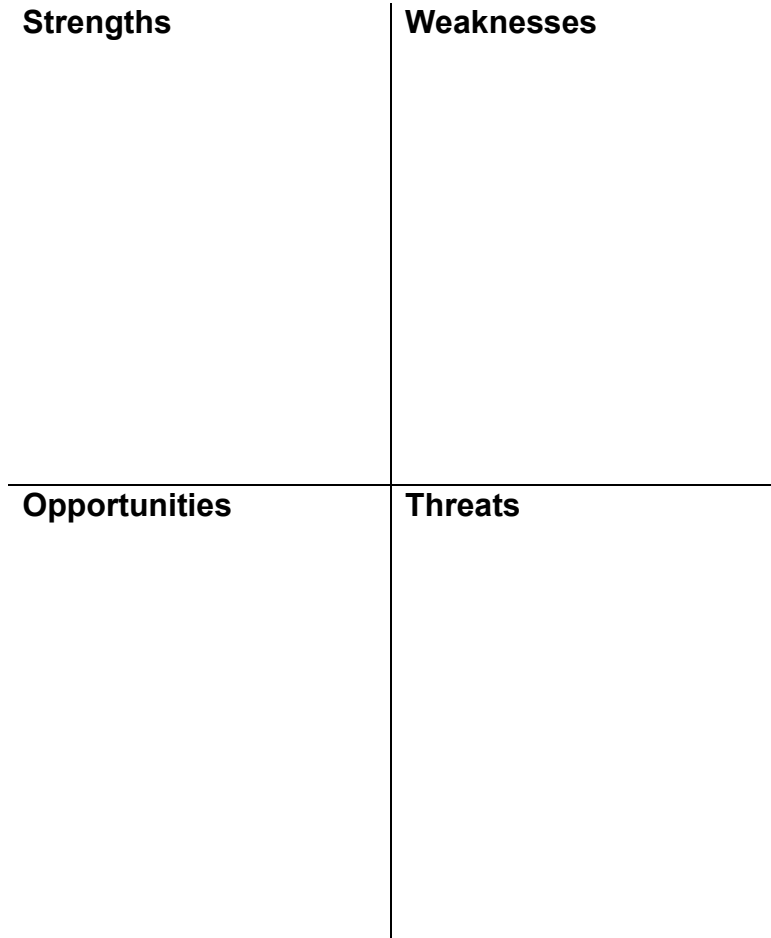
Pros and cons

Pros	Cons

Keyword/aims notes

Lecture Aims: 1.

                                 2.

                                 3.

Aim 1/ Keyword

....

....

....

Aim2/Keyword

....

....

....

Aim 3/Keyword

....

....

....

Matrix notes

Aspect	View 1	View 2	View 3
	(insert academic name/school of thought)		
A (insert sub-topic/theme)	Summarise what has been said/argued on the sub-topic by individual/group above		
B			
C			

Adapted from Macmillan and Weyers (2009), The Smarter Study Skills Companion Second Edition, p.123.

Cornell notes

Title of lecture/seminar

Class: _____
Date: _____

Cue Column

- Key words

- Key questions

Note-taking Column

- Key ideas
- Important dates, people, places
- Diagrams and pictures
- Formulas
- Repeated (stressed) information

Summary
- Summary of your notes in your own words

Adapted from Bourne (2015). Retrieved 2nd September, 2015, from http://www.learnu.org/is-the-cornell-note-taking-template-really-the-best/

Digital note taking

There are lots of ways to make and store notes digitally.

- A simple approach would be to type your notes directly into a word processer and save them in a file which can be accessed from multiple devices.
- You may wish to write your notes by hand then type them up or take photos of your handwritten notes and store them digitally.
- An alternative is to use a stylus to handwrite your notes directly on to a tablet or computer screen.
- Notes aren't always text based. You can access information and ideas through videos, photos diagrams and audio recordings. Digital note taking can help you capture and save this information in one place. This can be particularly useful if you plan to return to content in future.

Digital notebooks enable you to save documents, photos, web links and multimedia in a structured and accessible way. Their advantage over paper notebooks is that you can easily organise and amend your digital notebook at any point from different devices.

You can search a digital notebook by looking for a key word or 'tag'. You can define your own tags, for instance a tag might be 'asthma', 'pop art' or 'Mozart'.

Digital notebooks can be synced with multiple devices like phones or tablet computers, so all your notes are in one place. Your notes are saved automatically so you won't lose them unless you choose to delete them.

Digital notebooks include:

- Microsoft OneNote
- Evernote

Updated July 2019