

Note-taking for Research

GRS Writing Group – FRI 4 MAY 2018

Over the many years of study leading up to your current research course, you will have developed note-taking skills. As these are skills you will need during the course of your current studies and probably for the remainder of your career, every few years you may wish to periodically review your note-taking method and research how you can improve your strategy. Take a course, read a book, search online for advice from academics or other note-takers– then think about what elements of your method could be tweaked to improve the efficacy and efficiency of your note-taking. Note-taking is a necessary and powerful skill – improving your strategy is likely to make your research career even more successful.

Could your notetaking strategy be improved with regard to:

1) Recalling the content of the source you were reading or listening to.

If you re-read your notes, sometime years in the future, and they do not allow you to recall anything meaningful from the original source, you need to return to the source. At times, a link between some keywords and a reference may be all you are looking for. But most of the time, you take notes to help you to recall the material. If you routinely take meaningless notes, you may wish to consider researching note-taking for improved recall.



What's the best, most effective way to take notes?

<https://theconversation.com/whats-the-best-most-effective-way-to-take-notes-41961>

2) Reducing the probability of inadvertently plagiarising the source.

At times, you will want to copy text from a source in your notes. If this text is not distinguished in any way from your notes, you may inadvertently add this text to your work without proper attribution. To avoid potential plagiarism, develop a way of distinguishing copied text from your notes. You could make copied text a different colour, or in italics, or within inverted commas.

2) Developing your understanding of how the source content fits with your research.

While summarizing content is useful, ultimately you are reading the source for a purpose. Do not restrict your note-taking to highlighting, summarizing, paraphrasing or copying text (passive learning). Take notes about the meaning of the content with regard to your work (active learning). Move beyond remembering and understanding the source to applying, analyzing and evaluating the source.

There are a number of proformas you can use / adapt to help you actively engage with the source content.



Hyatt. Take Notes with a Structured Template.

<http://impedagogy.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Michael-Hyatt-Book-Insights-Template.pdf>

4) Linking to the original source.

A systematic approach to note-taking will help you create an everlasting link between your notes and the original source. Software is being continually released to help you with this. If you are using EndNote, you can rename two of your Empty Fields as Keywords and Notes and enter this information side by side with the source reference. And make sure when you enter the reference details they are correct!



How to add research notes to a reference in Endnote

<https://www.slideshare.net/iSkillsTav/adding-research-notes-to-a-reference-in-endnote-web>

5) Using note-taking software

Ultimately a good note-taking strategy will create notes that are easily searchable. While you do not necessarily need to create an e-library of notes, an e-library will be easier to search. If you prefer hand written notes, you may consider scanning them and adding them to an e-library.

If you do choose to keep an e-library of your notes, find a systematic way to file your notes in folders and create a naming convention that allows you to find relevant notes easily.

You may want to use note-taking software to create your notes. If you change apps, consider moving your existing note library across to the new app – the notes you create now are likely to be useful for you in the future, so try to avoid fragmenting your note library across different apps.



Evernote, OneNote, and Beyond: The 14 Best Note-Taking Apps

<https://zapier.com/blog/best-note-taking-apps/>

Further reading:



van der Meer. 2012. Students' note-taking challenges in the 21st century: considerations for teachers and academic staff developers, *Teaching in Higher Education*. 17(1): 13-23

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2011.590974>

Next session JUN 1: Self-plagiarism.

Find further details of the UWA GRS Writing Group, including advice sheets to download, see: www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/resources/communities#writinggroup