

Note making



Note taking vs note making

Note taking and note making are two different processes. Note taking is passive, you are writing what you see, read or hear word-for-word without having to analyse or include your opinion. You are trying to take down as much detail as possible. Note making on the other hand is active. You should include your thoughts, opinions and ideas. Whilst note making you will use information you have already acquired from class or your research, and be able to summarise what you have learned.

You may find it easier to take notes initially and then use these, along with your existing knowledge, to consolidate information and make notes.

When and why we make notes

Notes allow us to develop and strengthen our knowledge in many different ways. Both taking and making notes have their place in your learning process and you should always aim to think about why you are creating your notes and decide which process is the most appropriate.

There are many occasions when taking notes is useful. A simple shopping list is a form of note taking. If you were to start an assignment without note making, you would find it difficult to use your own words and thoughts and you may fall into the trap of just reiterating someone else's ideas.

They can help us with:

- Concentrating and focusing our attention on the question(s) at hand
- Remembering what we have read/heard
- Keeping a written record
- Summarising
- Re-organising information in a way that better suits your learning style
- Highlighting key points for easy reference
- Planning i.e. putting down initial ideas for an essay or presentation
- Beginning the process of using your own words and style
- Producing a better assignment that gets higher marks

It would be difficult to remember all of the information covered during a class, tutorial or demonstration. In this instance taking note of the main points can help to trigger your memory, highlight any questions you have at the time and to make note of important data you might otherwise forget. **Taking notes** during a demonstration can be a helpful way to recall the demonstration later along with any additional information given at the time. Sometimes it can be helpful to make an annotated drawing (a drawing with notes and labels) during practical work or to note down the steps in a procedure which you may later need to follow.

You should always **make notes** when reading, especially if you are referring to many texts. You may not be able to access the same book again, for example if a library book you were referring to is out on loan, so it is a good idea to note down the key information you gained from it at the time. You will use this research to write your assignments and it is important to make sure they are written in a style that is your own. Try to think your notes through and write them in your own words; incorporate your own thoughts, ideas and

conclusions into the notes made from your lectures and research. If you use notes that you have written word-for-word in your assignments then you are at risk of not fully understanding the material and even unintentionally plagiarising someone else's words and ideas.

When making your notes, it is good practice to take full references from the resources that you are planning to use in your assignments. This will help you find and refer back to the resources at a later date, and structure citations and references where necessary. You can find more information on referencing and plagiarism in our Referencing guide.

Different methods of note making

Once you have written the initial information down (taken notes) you will be ready to organise the information and examine it more closely (make notes). Your notes may be long and are unlikely to be ordered in a way that is useable for an essay or assignment. It is important to think about how your notes fit together and to make links between different ideas and to see connections in the work of many different authors. There are different methods of note making and you may find one, or a combination, most useful for you.

The most common ways in which people organise their notes are by bullet points; mind mapping and visual notes.

Bullet point method

Bullet points can be used to list your notes in a clear, written format:

France

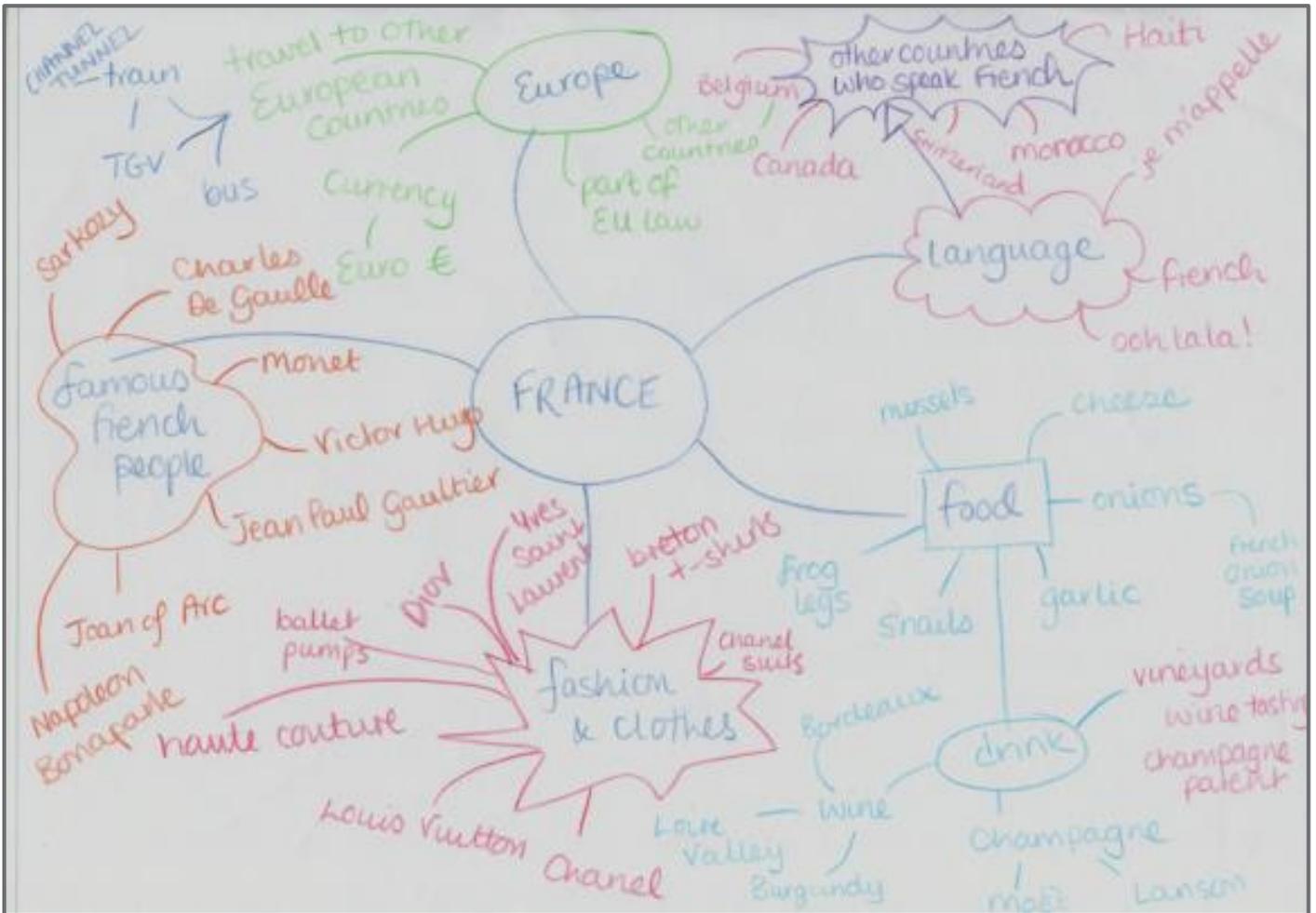
- Food—Cheese, frog's legs, red meat, snails, wine
- Politics—Socialist, Hollande, unitary semi-presidential government
- Tourism—EuroDisney, Eiffel Tower, cultural attractions

Some pros and cons of the bullet point format are:

Pros	Cons
Clear	Not visually appealing
Divided well with a clear structure	Can be difficult to groups ideas together
Can be added to easily	Risk of repetition
Can help to emphasise points	

Mind mapping method

A mind map is a diagram which is used to organise ideas visually:



Some pros and cons of the mind mapping format are:

Pros	Cons
Fun/interesting	Can be hard to decide on order of notes
Easy and quick	Limited space to expand ideas in
Visual – can be easy to understand and remember, link obvious	Can be chaotic/difficult to follow
Not in any fixed order – can link new and existing knowledge	Does not allow you to provide detail
Concise	

Combined note making methods

It is often useful to use more than one format to organise your notes. For example, if you listed your notes in bullet points first and then from these created a mind map you would be working your notes in two different ways which would help you to critically think about and remember the information. Using different methods can help to clarify connections and ideas because it can change the way notes appear on the page, the way you think about what you are reading and make it easier to identify connections.

There are various techniques that you may find helpful when taking or making notes and many people use a combination of them all depending on what best suits their learning style:

Visual style: Recopying your notes out in colour to help you organise them; organising your notes into categories or columns; writing key facts onto note cards and pinning them up on a board.

Auditory style: Discussing concepts, facts or ideas with a friend or classmate either in person or over the telephone; tape recording lessons and re-listening to them later; using background noise such as music to aid concentration.

Read/write styles: Condense your notes and re-read them over and over; rewrite the notes in another way in your own words.

If you are unsure about your learning style or preferences see our Study Skills and Learning Styles guide.

Good note making practice

When making notes it is important not to copy down large chunks of text as this will not help you to learn and can ultimately risk plagiarism; you have to interpret what you are reading into your own words. As previously discussed, note making is an active way of learning and will help you to remember the information at a later date. It is best to write in full sentences.

Abbreviations can be useful at times but it is important to make sure they are clear and you make a note of their meaning in case you forget.

Choose the most relevant information that will help you answer the question you have been given and try not to duplicate information. You will often come across the same information from many sources but there is no need to re-write it, just reference it from the most relevant text from where you found it

It is important to make it clear to yourself when you are taking a direct quotation from a source. As well as using quotation marks you might want to try highlighting direct quotations so you remember they are a quotation. This will help you to properly reference them if you go on to use them at a later date.

It is good practice to try and summarise your notes at the end of a section. Sum up the main points and write down your own thoughts and ideas on what you have read. Think about your opinion on what you have read and how this relates to what you already know. Critical thinking right from the start will help you when it comes to writing your assignment. For more information see our Thinking Skills guide.

There is evidence to suggest that students who look back over, summarise and critically think about their notes, are often more successful learners. It is important to look closely at the assignment title and check

through your notes to ensure you have all the information you need to answer the question and also to provide a solid and well informed piece of work. You can do this by reorganising your notes as previously mentioned, rewriting them to strengthen your understanding and by reflecting on them. Note making in this way will help you achieve a better assignment and, ultimately, a better mark.

Summary

This guide should help you understand the differences between merely taking notes and making notes in a way which will begin the critical thinking process and aid you in writing a well informed and coherent piece of work. The points covered should help you to improve upon and better understand the process and purpose of note making. The skill of note making can be learned and fine-tuned over time and with practice. If you need any further information or help with note making please feel free to ask any member of Learning Resources staff – we are always happy to help!