Approaches to learning

There are MANY forms of taking notes. Yes that's right, not just simply writing words on a page or typing them on a screen. We have to acknowledge that there is an ongoing battle between 'old school' pen and paper and newer electronic devices in the note-taking realm.

Interestingly, a study by Washington University (Hotz, 2016) found that those who typed notes had better recall of lecture content immediately after the lecture, while those who wrote their notes by hand had better recall over time. What does this mean? Well, basically it means you need to find what works for you and the situation you are in.

Below you'll find a brief overview of some of the current popular techniques as well as links out to helpful information on learning how to use them.

Best approaches to learning

One of the features we need to look at is how we adapt memory and learning to note-taking. Let's look at a study from Kent State University (Paul, 2013) which looked at the best, worst, and mediocre study techniques. Their findings are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Note-Taking Strategies		
Good	**Mediocre**	**Worst**
→ Spreading out study sessions (distributed practice) → Practice testing	→ Mental imagery → Asking 'why' whilst reading (elaborative interrogation) → Mixing problems (interleaved practice) → Mnemonics (word association)	→ Highlighting and underlining → Rereading → Summarising key points

Adapted from Paul (2013). Copyright 2013 by *Time*.

So what does this tell us? Firstly, note-taking isn't necessarily the top technique for learning, but can form an integral part of that technique. The best learning strategies are not specifically about note-taking but rely on you having taken good notes. It also shows that we need to rethink some more traditional approaches to taking notes. It might be time to retire that highlighter!?

It's still important to 'note' that you have to find the format that actually works for you, and that this might not be what is easiest to do at the time. It needs to be the option that best facilitates your capacity to learn. Note-taking techniques (PDF, 513 kB) can help you to identify a specific technique that could work for you.

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References

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