



General note-taking advice

There are just some aspects of note-taking that are going to be similar no matter what format you end up adopting. In this section, we're looking at some of those tried and tested elements that you need to keep in mind always.

Tips

1. Hand-written material really has a proven benefit. Research has shown (Pinola, 2011) that writing tells your brain to activate, wake up, and pay attention, whereas simply typing can become muscle memory and have less cognitive involvement.
2. Learn some abbreviations. If you haven't already, you'll soon be bombarded with a flurry of information. Getting some abbreviations under your belt will speed up the process of getting your notes down. There are many types of abbreviations and some examples are provided in Tables 1 and 2 below. At the end of the day it is really up to you to decide what types of abbreviations you use, just as long as you are able to understand what your notes mean.
3. For those of us that have found digital devices are our preferred learning method, it's time to get intimately familiar with keyboard and mouse shortcuts. These speed up your typing by eliminating needless physical movements and allow you to jump between and within applications more quickly. It might not seem much at the time but all those movements quickly add up in a day. Keyboard shortcuts also allow you to be more fluid and streamlined in the way you use your computer and cause less interruption.

Table 1. Word truncation examples

Truncation	Word
dep	department
ed	education
eqn	equation
esp	especially
gov	government
natl	national
ppl	people
res	research
ustand	understand

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Table 2. Abbreviation examples

Symbol or abbreviation	Expansion
∴	because
∴	therefore OR consequently
+ &	and OR plus
?	question OR doubt OR possibility
>	greater than
<	less than
# no.	number
\$	dollars OR money OR cost
Δ	change
/	per OR each
↑	increase OR improvement
→	leads to OR causes
↓	decrease OR deterioration
↔	linked OR interrelated OR connected
↛	does not lead to
=	equal OR the same as
~	approximately OR around OR similar to
≠	not equal OR not the same as
X strikethrough	not
...	etc. OR missing words
etc.	et cetera; and so on
et al.	and the other authors
e.g.	for example
i.e.	that is
NB *	note well OR remember this
♂/♀	male / female
§	section
¶ para	paragraph
p./pp.	page / pages
c.	with / about (circa)
w/o	without
1st / 2nd / 3rd / 4th	first / second / third / fourth

Symbol or abbreviation	Expansion
@	at
cf.	compare to
am	morning
pm	afternoon
viz	namely
asap	as soon as possible
wrt	with respect to

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Research and readings

It is 100% guaranteed that during your time at university you will be researching content for an assessment or exam and looking at journal articles and other readings. Taking notes on these is important and you need to find your ‘groove’ in the note taking world. In addition, the following brief points can help to further extend your note taking to readings. They can equally apply to the classes you attend, too!

Quotes versus paraphrasing

- Use quotes when you need to draw on the authority of the author.
- Paraphrase when you need to better understand the content in a different context.

Summary and personal thoughts

- Write up a summary of the notes you’ve made, including quotes and paraphrased work. This allows you to clearly see the key aspects you’ve learnt.
- Add your personal thoughts too. This allows you to ‘think out loud’ on the page and allows you to revisit your notes and understand the information in your own voice.

Referencing and citation

- Provide the full reference to the best of your ability so you don’t lose track of where the information comes from.
- Cite while you write, even if they are just notes. This will allow you to easily go back to your content and follow up where you got the information from. This is invaluable when you’re beginning to write up your assessments.

Portfolio/Reflection

Guess what... if you’ve gotten this far and implemented all these steps, there will be a billion and one new thoughts/concepts/ideas/facts buzzing around your head. What’s even better is that maybe you’ve now captured them in a structured format and you’ve come away from your classes as an active rather than passive participant. You’ll also be beginning to form creative ideas and opinions around all that you’ve learnt.

By starting a daily professional journal (which need only be five key points each day) you can quickly and easily capture these thoughts. More often than not, you might never need to refer back to them. But every now and again there'll be that nugget of information that will lead you to achieving that elusive HD in your next assessment or exam.

References

Pinola, M. (2011). Why you learn more effectively by writing than by typing. *Lifehacker*. Retrieved from <http://lifehacker.com/5738093/why-you-learn-more-effectively-by-writing-than-typing/all>

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