

Basics

Making notes when you read is an important skill when you're studying and trying to learn and remember a lot of information. You can look back at your notes when you come to revise – good notes will remind you of all the information you need to remember.

When you make notes, there are some things you should think about:

- Why are you making notes and who are they for?
- Are you going to write your own essay or report using your notes?
- Will you give a presentation using your notes?

The academic context

When you are studying at college or university, you will have to do a lot of reading. To help you remember what you've read, it is very important to make notes – and to learn how to make notes that include all the essential information and will make sense when you read them again at a later date.

The notes you make as you read throughout the academic year will be an essential tool when you start to revise for exams and assessments towards the end of the year. Your notes will mean you won't need to read all the books and articles again.

Good note making will help you understand texts better and to use the main ideas later to understand lectures, write reports and give presentations.

Key features

Here are some points that will help you to make good notes:

- Before you read, think about what you want to learn. Ask yourself some questions about the topic. As you read, see if the text answers your questions. See if you learn information that you didn't know before.
- Keep your notes brief, and leave spaces between lines. Choose only key points from the text, and use your own words. Don't copy complete sentences or cut and paste if you read online.
- Make notes actively. Think about what you're reading as you make notes.
- Don't simply highlight or underline parts of a text. It doesn't mean that you understand it or that you can relate to the information.
- Read parts of a text and then cover it. Make notes from what you remember so that you don't use the same words as the writer.
- If you need to use a direct quote from the text, make it clear that you have done that. Remember that using other writers' ideas directly without crediting them is an academic offence.

Challenges / difficulties

At a lower level of English, you will find it easier to mark the text. However, you need to learn that this does **not** mean you understand the text. You must understand the text in order to be able to make good notes.

In some brief texts, you might feel that every line is important and find it difficult choose what to note down. Try to choose key words.

How can I develop this skill?

As with a lot of skills, the key is to practise. Try to develop your own way of making notes. Use abbreviations. Learn to write fast. Make notes on reading texts of all types – newspaper articles, instructions, stories, etc., as well as academic texts; then reread your notes later to make sure they really do help you to remember everything you read.

Learning outcomes

Students who have learnt this skill should:

- be aware of efficient and inefficient approaches to note making
- understand that different note-making approaches will be better suited to different types of text and different parts of a text
- make notes more actively and more efficiently

Theory to practice

The way you make notes depends on the topic of the text. Often it is best to make simple, short notes, by noting information as you find it in the text. You don't write full sentences. You add headings and subheadings and use abbreviations. You use bullet points or numbers, and you highlight or underline key words.

What to do in storm

outside

- Find building / get in car – trees, bus stops etc – no protection
- Stay away from water / if in w go to dry land
- no mob. phones

inside / at home

- don't shower – lightning passes through water
- disconnect elec. apps
- use torch – candles dangerous

Some texts describe events in chronological order. Where dates are important, write the dates in the margin and one or two key words next to each date.

1888 – born in Rome / second son

1892 – mother died / family to Paris

1894 – started school

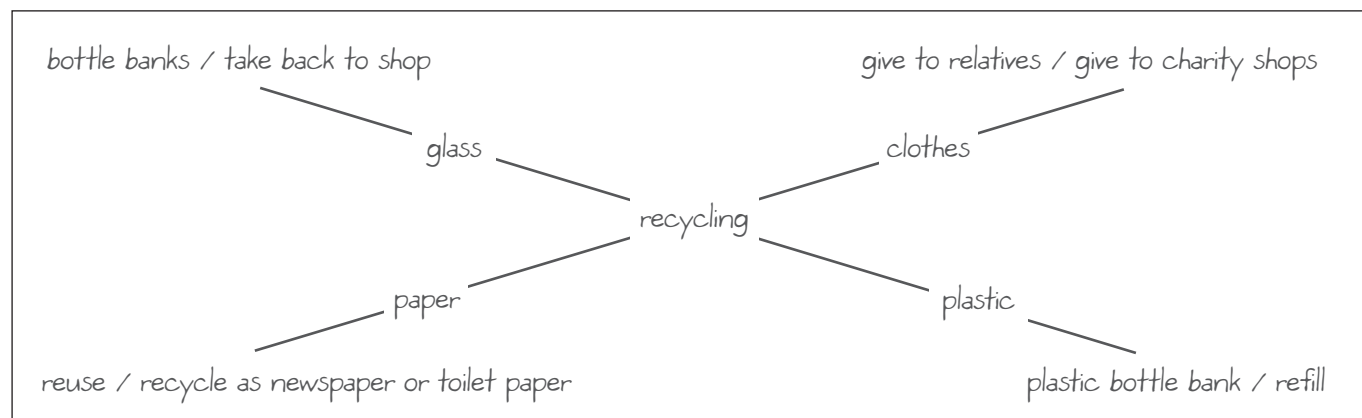
Some texts or parts of texts describe a process of cause and effect. Make notes as a flow chart.

land dry → strong wind → wind and sand makes more sand loose → sandstorm

If you make notes about a text that expresses different opinions or advantages and disadvantages, you can use columns with headings.

living in city + more jobs	living in city – expensive pollution	living in country + fresh air slower life	living in country – no restaurants/cinema
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Sometimes the best way to make notes is using a spidergram or mind map. Put the main topic at the centre and main points and subpoints around that.



For some texts, you need to use different techniques for different parts of the text.

Try to use all of the methods above when you make notes, and see which ones work best for you.

Ways to get more practice

Read different text types and texts on various topics to practise different techniques. Work with a partner. Make notes on the same text and then compare your notes. You can also check advice about note making online.