

***Taking Useful Notes from Texts***

*There are many techniques for taking notes from books. The one you select will vary with the type of book, the assignment, and the requirements of the instructor. What won’t change, however, is the need for you to take notes. You must make reading an active process. Note taking is a way to ensure you get involved with what you’re reading.*

Ideas organized in a way that makes sense to you are easier to remember than isolated bits of information. Thus, your goal for note taking is to identify information you need and organize it so you can use it to help you study efficiently and effectively.

Begin a reading/study session by previewing the entire assignment —read the titles, subtitles, introduction, conclusion, and chapter questions to get an overview of the content. Set your purpose for this assignment.

Based on your preview, list the main topics in the reading assignment. Then write down information you already know about the topics, plus questions you have about the topics and questions your instructor has given you. In other words, *give yourself a reason to read*—identify some ideas and information you need to discover.

Now you are ready to read and take notes. As an active reader—one with a reason to read—you will distinguish information that is important to your purpose from interesting, but unimportant minor details. There are two choices for taking notes directly in the book.

***1. Annotate*** This means to write brief notes in the margins. It’s a good strategy because it makes you an active, thinking participant. 1) Decide what level of information you need for this purpose. 2) After you read a section, write words and phrases in the margins that summarize the information you need to know. Mark important information with abbreviations such as “def” for definition, “ex” for example, “\*” for key point. Write questions you have about the author’s ideas. 3) After annotating a section, think about how what you’ve read and written are related to the questions you wrote for yourself during your preview.

1. ***Underline or Highlight*** You must be careful because the reader tends to mark too many lines. 1) Decide what level information you need. 2) Always read a section completely *before* you mark it. If you underline/highlight as you begin to read, you may mark information that is not important for your purpose. 3) Mark only the level of information you need, such as main ideas, major details, vocabulary. If you underline/highlight almost everything on the page, it’s no more helpful than if nothing is marked!

Choices for taking notes on paper include using graphic organizers, such as information maps and informal outlines, writing a summary, or a system you create. To take useful notes on paper, like taking notes in the text, you must set your purpose and *read a section through at least once* *before you begin to take notes*. Then, in your own word, write the ideas and information that fit your purpose. Organize it in a way that makes sense to you. One advantage of taking notes on paper is that you can combine your lecture notes with your text notes to increase your understanding of the topic.