

EFFECTIVE READING AND NOTE-TAKING



One of the key ingredients for success this year is study notes. These study notes need to be developed progressively throughout the year and structured in a way that is meaningful for you. As a result, one student's set of study notes will differ in their structure and style to the next student's set of notes.

Effective reading and note taking is the starting point for any set of notes.

READING

Effective study notes begins with effective reading. Effective reading is very different to the style of reading for relaxation or pleasure. Effective readers are focused, active readers who understand the importance of being able to:

- discriminating between relevant and irrelevant material,
- develop an understanding of the material, and
- memorise or remember the material.

An effective student understands the importance time and appreciates that it would be foolish to try and remember everything that is read. The time effort involved would be enormous. There is a three step process that should be followed – **PREVIEW – READ - RECALL**.

PREVIEW - READ - RECALL at first glance seems to be an intricate and time consuming process. However, it gets easier and faster with practice, ensures thorough learning and facilitates later "re-learning" when you review for exams. Give it a try!

PREVIEW

WHY?

If you give your mind a general framework of main ideas and structure, you will be better able to comprehend and retain the details you will read later.

HOW?

1. Look quickly (10 minutes) over the following key parts of your textbook to see what it's all about and how it is organized:
 - Title
 - Front and back cover information
 - Author's biographical data
 - Publication date
 - Table of Contents
 - Introduction or Preface
 - Index
 - Glossary
2. Before you read each chapter, look over:
 - Title
 - Introduction
 - Sub-headings
 - First sentences of each paragraph (should give main idea).
 - Any diagrams, charts, etc.
 - Conclusions or summaries
3. Then answer the following questions:
 - What is this mainly about?
 - How is it organised?
 - How difficult is it?
 - About how long will it take to read?



READ ACTIVELY

WHY?

Being an active reader will involve you in understanding the material, combat boredom, and will increase retention.

HOW?

- Set realistic time goals and number of pages to be read.
- Divide your chapter into small (1/2 page? 1 column?) sections, rather than try to read the whole chapter non-stop.
- Ask yourself a question before each paragraph or section, then seek its answer. This will give you a definite purpose for your reading. Try inverting the sub-heading or first sentence into question form, using "who," "what," "when," or "how" if necessary.
- Take breaks when you feel unable to stay with the material due to day-dreaming, drowsiness, boredom, hunger, etc. After a short break, you can return to your reading with more energy and alertness.

RECALL

WHY?

Research shows that 40 - 50% of the material we read is forgotten very shortly (about 15 minutes) after we read it. Immediate recall is an essential first step toward continued retention of the material.

HOW?

- After reading each small section of material, choose one (or more) of the following methods:
- Recall mentally or recite orally the highlights of what you have read.
- Ask yourself questions (maybe the same ones you used before you read the section) and answer them in your own words.
- Underline and make marginal notes of the key words or phrases in the section. Underlining after you read is the best way to decide what's the most important information to remember.
- Make separate notes or outlines of what you have read. This technique often works for more technical material which you need to put into your own words.
- Recall with a friend. What you don't recall, he/she might.

EFFECTIVE READERS ARE ACTIVE, FOCUSED READERS WHO PREVIEW – READ - RECALL

NOTE-TAKING AND IN-CLASS SKILLS

Many students would argue that lessons at school are extremely valuable for a variety of reasons but only a small number of students know how to fully utilise the material presented by their teachers. A large number of students do are not effective note-takers during class time. Adequate notes are a necessary adjunct to efficient study and learning. Think over the following suggestions and improve your note-taking system where needed.

- Listen actively - if possible think before you write - but don't get behind.
- Be open minded about points you disagree on. Don't let arguing interfere with your note-taking in class.
- Raise questions if appropriate.
- Develop and use a standard method of note-taking including punctuation, abbreviations, margins, etc.
- Take and keep notes in a large notebook. The only merit to a small notebook is ease of carrying and that is not your main objective. A large notebook allows you to adequately indent and use an outline form.
- Leave a few spaces blank as you move from one point to the next so that you can fill in additional points later if necessary. Your objective is to take helpful notes, not to save paper.
- Do not try to take down everything that your teacher covers. It is impossible in the first place and unnecessary in the second place because not everything is of equal importance. Spend more time listening and attempt to take down the main points. If you are writing as fast as you can, you cannot be as discriminating a listener. There may be some times, however, when it is more important to write than to think.



- Listen for cues as to important points, transition from one point to the next, repetition of points for emphasis, changes in voice inflections, enumeration of a series of points, etc.
- Many teachers attempt to present a few major points and several minor points during a lesson. The rest is explanatory material and samples. Be alert to cues about what the teacher thinks is important.
- Make your original notes legible enough for your own reading, but use abbreviations when possible. The effort required to recopy notes can be better spent in rereading them and thinking about them.
- Although neatness is a virtue in some respect, it does not necessarily increase your learning.
- Copy down everything on the board, regardless. Did you ever stop to think that every whiteboard scribble may be a clue to an assessable item? You may not be able to integrate what is on the board into your study notes, but if you copy it, it may serve as a useful clue for you later. If not, what the heck -- you haven't wasted anything. You were in the classroom anyway.
- Sit as close to the front of the class, there are fewer distractions and it is easier to hear, see and attend to important material.
- Get assignments and suggestions precisely - ask questions if you're not sure.

SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS ARE EFFECTIVE NOTE-TAKERS IN CLASS