

# Note taking

We take notes to record concepts, ideas and other details that we gain from our **listening** (i.e. in lectures, seminars, tutorials, etc.) as well as also from our **reading**. As you listen or read, it is helpful to have an organised way of recording key information so that you can use it effectively in your academic assignments.

## Before you listen

- **Think about the topic.** Predict what you are going to hear. It helps to do any pre-reading that has been set for you.
- **Make use of available resources.** If your lecturer has made a PowerPoint or other notes available prior to the session, download them, read them and be prepared to annotate them with your ideas as you listen.

## As you listen

- **Summarise main ideas, not words** - if you try to write down everything you may miss key words or ideas
- **Reserve at least one-third of your notebook page** to write down your own responses to what you are hearing, or any questions that arise for you
- **Organise the ideas with headings, subheadings** to show a clear flow or hierarchy of information from general to more specific
- **Emphasise important ideas** by highlighting or underlining main concepts and keywords
- **Capture relationships between ideas** using mind maps, diagrams, arrows or sketches.

## Before your read

- Think about what you hope to gain from reading the text. What is your purpose for reading it? Ask yourself:
  - “Why am I reading this?”
  - “Why has the author written this?”
  - “What information am I hoping to get from this text?”
- As with listening, it helps to try and predict what is coming. Use the titles, headings, table of contents, diagrams etc. to help predict what the content will be about.

## As you read

Identify key ideas that are relevant to your purpose for reading. Think about what information might be relevant and useful for that purpose. E.g. If you are reading for background information on a topic, you may not need to copy much from the text. If you are reading to find some specific details to use in an assignment, you might want to note down these ideas in more complete form.

It helps to take notes as you read and then regroup these to produce your own summary, in your own words. For example, after reading a couple of pages or sections, stop reading and ask yourself, what have I understood from this text? Then try and write down any points that you feel are relevant or likely to be useful for your work. You can try and paraphrase these (write them in your own words). Make sure to record the details about the text where these ideas come from.

## Direct quotes

Direct quotes are phrases or sentences copied word for word from a text. Sometimes it's useful to take the original author's exact words rather than try to paraphrase them. If you decide to use direct quotes in your assignments, you need to copy the words exact as they are in the original text. Don't use abbreviations and show exactly which words are being quoted using by enclosing them in inverted commas (" ").

## Recording the sources of your notes

For both paraphrases and direct quotes, you need to record the full publication details for later use in your reference list. These details include:

- author's name/s
- title of text/article
- publisher
- place & year of publication
- page numbers for the direct quotes
- and possibly other details depending on the type of text.

Details of what to include and how to format this information is available from VU Library's referencing guides page at <https://www.vu.edu.au/library/referencing-copyright/referencing-guides-0>

## Taking notes – some general tips

**Outlines** - Write the main ideas in **point form** and use numbers and letters, headings and subheadings to indicate main ideas and subordinate ideas.

**Abbreviations** can save a lot of time in note taking, but only use abbreviations that you will understand when you read your notes at a late point in time. If you want to start using new abbreviations, start with about five and use them until they become automatic before you introduce more.

**Organising your lecture and tutorial notes** – After the class, you might need to rewriting so that they are more readable, more succinct and better organised.

**Note taking** is about selecting and condensing information in ways that you can easily retrieve or commit to memory.