8 Making notes

Why make notes?

The ability to make clear and concise notes is one of the most important skills you will need to develop. The actual process of making notes helps you to gain a deeper understanding of the subject and capture the essential points of a topic.

This section shows you several different ways of making notes. The following suggestions will help you to make notes more effectively.

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We make notes for a number of reasons.

Notes are:

• a memory-aid for revision;
• a reminder of the main points of a topic; and
• an important source of material for an assignment.

Note-taking:

• aids concentration;
• builds up an understanding of the topic;
• prompts questions; and
• reinforces knowledge.

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Active reading

A common mistake when making notes is to write down too much as you are unsure about what you will need later. You can improve your note-taking efficiency by taking some time to consider precisely what you are looking for before you start to read. What are the sanitation options for a rural, low-income community?

• What needs to be considered before a decision about improving sanitary conditions is made?

• Who should be involved in the decision-making?

• What are the possible problems that may be encountered if a particular option is chosen?

Further advice on reading styles and the setting of reading goals can be found in Section 3 Reading efficiently.

You can cut down on the amount of notes you make by simply answering the questions you pose. If you are focused on the information you are looking for, you are halfway to producing focused notes.

However, there are a few things on which you should take care:

Do:

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Note-taking styles

Another way to group your notes is to file them under the author's name; this can make life easier when compiling references. Whichever approach you adopt, the source of the material should be included on the card or computer record