



ARKS KEYS TO LEARNING

MAKING SENSE OF INFORMATION

MAKING SENSE OF INFORMATION

Introduction

When learning anything new, or when carrying out a piece of work, you often have to gather information. This raises problems of:

- where to look for information
- how to select relevant information
- how to record it

This chapter looks at ways of answering these questions.

- It offers practical advice on reading and taking notes.
- Includes useful tips on selecting information.
- Has a range of alternative ways of organising information, so that you can select which ones suit you.

Once these important stages are dealt with, you will be ready to plan and carry out any work with greater confidence. This will come from knowing that you are well prepared and have the relevant information to work from.

SELECTING INFORMATION



In this section you will consider:

- different types of information available to you
- where to look for information

Think for a moment of all the ways you have learned in your life, and who or what you have learned from. These may be newspapers, T.V., your parents...



Activity 1

Make a note of some of the sources of information you have used throughout your life:

Now look at these resources in more detail. You use different resources to find different pieces of information.

Activity 2

Where would you go if you wanted to know more about the following?



If I want to find out about.....	I would go to.....
welfare benefits	
what to do, about noisy neighbours	
how to spell a word	
the times of the tides	
who the local councillor is	
my home town during the Second World War	
what Muslims believe in	
what happened in Parliament yesterday – and 50 years ago	
where Estonia is	
dyslexia and how to support a dyslexic child	

Think about the work you are doing just now:

- Where can you look for information?
- What resources can you use?

Brainstorm some ideas to get you started. If you are working in a group, do this together with one member taking notes, so that all possibilities are recorded. If you are working on your own, write or draw your brainstorm.

Resources

Resources are any materials or people, such as books, videos, tutors and computers which can supply you with information. Here are some examples. Look at the list and think about which ones you would find most useful. Add any more that you can think of.

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| People | Tutors, colleagues, experts, politicians, librarians, friends. |
| Print | Books, including reference books, dictionaries, directories, leaflets, worksheets, handouts, newspapers, articles, journals, archives, statistics. |
| Visual | Slides, photographs, pictures, posters. |
| Audio-visual | Videos, films, audio cassettes, T.V. |
| Organisations | Libraries, museums, local council, civil registers, voluntary organisations. |
| Computers | Data bases, CD-ROMs, Internet. |
| Objects | Biological and scientific samples, historical remains. |

When searching for information, try not to lose sight of your purpose, why you are gathering the information and what you plan to do with it. This should help you to avoid distractions.

Once you find some useful information, you then have to decide how best to collect and record it. (See section on **Taking Notes** in this pack).

Evaluation Questions

What sources of information have you used before, on other projects?



What do you think?

How useful did you find the information these sources provided? Explain your answer.

Does your past experience help you to select information for the work you are doing just now? Say why, or why not.

READING FOR DIFFERENT PURPOSES



This section asks you to think about:

- why you read things
- what you hope to get out of them
- how you can read effectively

Before reading something, ask yourself the following questions:

- Why am I reading this?
- Where should I start?
- Do I need to read it all?
- Which part will be most useful?
- How do I find out the author's point of view?
- How can this text help me?

What Do You Read?

People read for different purposes and each purpose can use a different style of reading. Sometimes you may read a magazine or novel for pleasure, whilst at other times you may **have** to read some important information.

Here are some of the main styles of reading:

- a quick glance to see what something is about
- quickly going through something to find a particular piece of information
- studying a text closely to understand it in detail
- reading a difficult section repeatedly to improve understanding
- reading carefully to pick out the main points
- reading for relaxation and enjoyment

These approaches suit different situations, e.g. looking up a telephone number; reading a magazine; an office memo or e-mail; an article for a class; a report for a meeting; an instruction manual; a text message; or a form to be completed.



Activity 1

Make a list of some of the different things you have had to read recently.

What different styles of reading did you use?

Activity 2

Look at the two lists below. One lists different types of reading materials and the other different methods of reading.



Match up the pairs you think go together.

Type of reading material

Method of reading

sports page of a newspaper

plotting a route

instructions on a packet

looking up facts

science fiction novel

quick scan to find results

A-Z map of Glasgow

slow step by step reading

table of library opening hours

repeated reading, thinking and re-reading

complete train timetable

repeated reading and reciting

computer manual

fast reading without effort

crossword clues

scan quickly to get going

rules of Monopoly game

quick glance and pin up

poem in school poetry book

careful slow reading

Now think about the different types of reading that you have to do for your work and the methods you can use.

Skimming and Scanning

Two types of reading that you will find most useful for studying are **skimming** and **scanning**.

Skimming means glancing at an article or book very quickly, to get a rough idea of what it is about, without going into much detail. **You do not try to read every word.** There are three different ways of skimming:



Activity

Activity 3

1. Understanding the missing words

Read through the two passages below and see if you can understand them.

_____ is a very _____ _____ as is _____ when you _____ how _____ it _____ you to _____ to _____. As the _____ _____ from left to right _____ _____ of _____ it _____ and _____.

Reading _____ complex process, _____ obvious _____ think _____ long _____ takes _____ learn _____ read. _____ eyes move _____ _____ across the page _____ print _____ jerks _____ pauses.

Which passage was easier to read? Can you think why?

Activity 3 continued

They are actually taken from the same passage but the first contains mainly **padding words** while the second included the **key words** which carry the meaning of the text.



You do not need to read every word. Your eyes take in groups of words at a time and your brain guesses what the text is saying, filling in the padding words and making sense of it.

Start looking out for key words and phrases in your reading.

2. Reading the first line of each paragraph

Look at a text that you have to read (or ask your tutor for something). Try skim reading by reading only the first line of each paragraph.

Did you get a fairly good idea what the passage was about? If it's not clear, try reading the first and last sentence of each paragraph.

This method of skimming works well because a paragraph often begins with a topic sentence, indicating what the paragraph is about. Reading each topic sentence in a text can give you enough information for you to decide whether or not the text is of interest to you.

Try this method out the next time you read a newspaper and see if it works.

3. Skimming content pages, index, chapter headings, sub-headings etc.

These can give you a good idea of what a book is about and whether or not it includes topics you are interested in. Have you ever tried this method when looking at books or longer articles?

Scanning is searching through a piece of text for specific items of information, e.g. a date, a figure or a name. While scanning you ignore all other information, concentrating only on finding what you want.



Activity

Activity 4

Look at the article on the next page. Try to answer the following questions without reading the whole text by scanning the passage to find the information you require.

1. Who carried out the research?
2. What does MRC stand for?
3. Why does Dr. Prentice think that people have become fatter?
4. How many calories did the weekly wash use in the 1950's?
5. How many hours a week does the average British child watch television?

Activity 4 continued



Activity
continued

Lazy Generation Grows Fat On Life With Labour-saving Gadgets

A study of the amount of energy it takes to perform everyday chores such as washing clothes and travelling to work, shows that improved technology is the prime cause of a dramatic increase in obesity.

Scientists have found that practically every sphere in life has been influenced by the development of labour saving devices which have conspired to make us put on weight. Gail Goldberg, a scientist with the Medical Research Council (MRC), has calculated the amount of energy spent carrying out chores now and comparing them with those carried out 40 years ago.

Jobs required much more effort in the 1950's. Goldberg's research estimates that the weekly washing before automatic washing machines and dryers would have taken a full day and used nearly 1,500 calories. Householders today only spend about 750 calories washing clothes. That is the equivalent of adding five cream cakes to the weekly diet!

Shopping has also changed beyond all recognition over the past generation. People used to have to walk to the local shops and back again, carrying all their heavy shopping. There were no supermarkets so they had to visit different shops such as the butcher, greengrocer and dairy for different items. Now we choose to drive to the supermarket and

use trolleys to carry goods to the car. We can now buy more goods at a time and so don't have to shop as often.

The research found that in 1950's Britain, people spent on average ten hours a week and 2,400 calories walking from shop to shop. Today the same shopping would take two hours and use 274 calories with the help of the supermarket trolley and car.

If the modern shopper spent the eight hours saved by just one supermarket trip, watching television, the difference between the two shoppers would amount to 1,500 calories a week or 32,000 calories a year - the equivalent of 16 days food. Dr. Andrew Prentice, a senior researcher with the MRC, says that as obesity rates have risen, the total consumption of calories has actually decreased. The energy saved by inactive living can be substantial and will ultimately be laid down as fat. People don't mean to get fat and unhealthy, life has just changed without them noticing.

The scientists also calculated that a child watching television for 28 hours a week - the average in Britain - would use nearly 600 calories a day less than children playing outside. This means that a child watching television instead of kicking a football everyday, would have to compensate by not eating for two days a week.

Extract from The Sunday Times, 5th October 1997.



What do
you think?

When could you use scanning methods of reading? List your suggestions here or discuss your ideas with others in your group.

Careful Reading

Once you decide that an article or book requires careful reading, there are five useful steps to help you through the process:

- **survey**
- **question**
- **read**
- **recall**
- **review**

Survey + Question + Read + Recall + Review = SQ3R

SQ3R makes reading more active and improves understanding and concentration.

Survey: Quickly skim through the article to get an idea what it is about, looking for key words and phrases, topic sentences, etc. When checking a book, the contents list, index, and back cover summary can all help you decide how useful it may be to you.

Question: If you are reading a text to gather information for something in particular, think about the questions you are trying to answer. Try writing some questions down and then ask yourself if this text helps you to answer them? Is this what you are looking for? Asking yourself questions in this way will help to keep you focused on your subject.

Read: If the first two steps confirm that an article is worth reading, now you should read it carefully. Use a highlighter pen or make a few notes to help you remember important key points (see sections on **Highlighting** and **Taking Notes** in this pack). Once you are able to answer the questions that you set yourself in step two, you have probably read enough.

Recall: Put the article down for a moment and ask yourself your questions again to see if you can answer them without looking at your notes or the text. This will test your understanding of the reading and also helps to place it in your long term memory.

Review: Return to the text to check that your answers are correct and that you have not missed any important details.

How can **SQ3R** help you in your work?



What do you think?



Activity 5

Choose a short article that you have to read or ask your tutor to help you select one.

Follow the **SQ3R** steps in the checklist below:

- **Survey** the article to get the general meaning of the text
- What **questions** do you think the article can help you answer?
- **Read** the article more carefully, highlighting key words
- **Recall** what it was about
- **Review** your answers, checking back to the text

Do you feel that you understand what the article is about? Comment on what you like, or dislike about this method of reading.

Reading Checklist

Once you have read an article can you:

- recognise the main points of the article?
- remember the main points both immediately and some time later?
- understand what you have read?
- draw some conclusions?
- make useful notes? (see section on **Taking Notes** in this pack)
- make critical comments on what you have read?
- link your reading to other things you already know on the subject?
- discuss what you have read and answer questions about it?
- summarise the text? (see sections on **Summaries** in this pack).



What you
have learned

Evaluation Questions

What have you found most useful in this reading section?

Have any of the suggested methods changed the way you read or work?

Have these activities helped with any problems you have experienced with reading?
You might like to discuss these problems with your tutor or colleagues.

READING CRITICALLY

In everyday life, people are often faced with a wide variety of items to read in the form of books, articles, letters, leaflets etc. These involve different styles of writing and are written for many different purposes. Texts can be written to give information, or state a particular point of view and they can also be written to entertain. Often a piece of writing will include the writer's own opinions and you are left to decide whether you agree with these or not.

This is what it means to read critically; to recognise bias or one side of an argument.

Read the text and answer the question that follows.

Text 1: Creches for Children

In almost every town or village you will find creches or nurseries for young children. Most children like these places very much: they can play as much as they want; there are lots of toys; other children to play with; and adults who give them lots of attention. If they show the slightest sign of getting bored, a loving adult helps them to get back to play. Children feel safe. They don't miss their parents because there are nice adults to take care of them all day.

Parents can leave their children with a clear conscience because they are being well taken care of. They can go to work, do the shopping, whatever. It is refreshing for both parents and children to be apart for some time. They can then appreciate each other when they are together.

Is this writer for or against creches for young children? Write down the arguments given.





Text 2: Creches for Children

If parents are fed up with their children, they can put them away for a while in a creche or a nursery. If they want to continue their careers after the birth of a child, they can take their beloved little ones to a creche so that someone else can look after them. However, this means that parents can miss out on a lot of special moments in their children's development.

These children often have to deal with a lot of different adults which can make them feel insecure. Missing their parents can make them feel unhappy. They have to fit in with the routine of the nursery and get on with the other children there. Their parents have left them and when they do take them home at the end of the day, they are often tired and rushed.

Is this writer for or against creches? What arguments are given this time?

Compare your answers with others in your group and see if they found the same arguments as you did.

In both of these texts the writers have strong opinions about creches and their role in the community. You may agree with some of their arguments but not others. That is why it is good to ask yourself questions when reading:

- Do I agree with this writer?
- Is he/she right?
- What is the main point that he/she is trying to make?
- Is he/she biased in any way?

Activity

Practise reading some newspaper articles critically and if you can, discuss them with others to see if they share your views.

Choose something you have to work on and read it critically. You can use the questions above to guide you.





What do you think?

Evaluation Questions

When you read a text, how do you decide if the writer is biased in any way?

When you read something, do you feel that you read critically? Explain why, or why not.

How can you help yourself to become more aware of bias when you are reading?

UNDERLINING AND HIGHLIGHTING

In this section you will practise:

- **identifying main points and side issues**
- **recognising key words and phrases**
- **when to underline and highlight information**



When reading a text and you want to take notes, make a diagram or mind map, it is important to be able to recognise which are the main points of the text and which are the side issues.

The activities on the next few pages may help you:

Main Points and Side Issues



Activity 1

Find the difference between main points and side issues.

Here are three columns of words. Within each column are a number of important and a number of less important words.

In each column, underline the three words which you think are the most important in relation to the heading.

village	car	house
houses	horn	door
streets	key	wc
lamp post	steering wheel	roof
people	seat	attic
shops	engine	walls
dog dirt	lights	gutter
cars	wheel	windows
library	door	cellar
bus station	tyre	chimney
factory	open roof	doorstep
church	accelerator	bath

Activity 1 continued

When do you think something is a main point?



**Activity
continued**

And when is it a side issue?

If you can, compare the words you underlined with a colleague. Are there many differences?



Activity

Activity 2

Read the text below and decide which details are the main points and which are the side issues.

Peter is looking for a new job. He has been a fire fighter for 15 years and last year he was awarded a medal for rescuing a man and his dog from a frozen lake. However, Peter has always wanted to run his own business. He has been attending computer classes in the evenings for the past two years and now feels quite confident with these new skills, especially desktop publishing. A small shop is for rent in the town where he lives and he would like to open a printing business. He would print tickets, leaflets, and publicity materials for local businesses and organisations. Peter's wife works in the sports centre in the town and she is sure that they would prefer to use a local printer rather than the one they currently use which is based in the city 30 miles away.

The main points in this text are.....

The side issues in this text are.....

Activity 3

Look at something you have to read, or choose a newspaper article. Read it carefully and try to identify what are main points and what are side issues. If you can, discuss your results with others.



Underlining and Highlighting

Do you ever mark words or sentences when you are reading? If so, what do you do?

You can **underline** words and (parts of) sentences in pen or pencil.

You can **highlight** them with a felt tip pen or highlighter pen.

Why do that?

When you read a text, you may want to remember certain things that are in it. Underlining or highlighting can help.

But the question is, what to underline or highlight?

How do you decide?

Try not to highlight or underline whole sentences, only the most important parts.



Activity 1

Here is the same text twice, with different parts underlined. What differences do you notice between them?

1. Scary mushrooms

I am a 17 year old boy and I have a problem.

Shortly before the new year started, I used magic mushrooms with a friend of mine. Ever since then, up to and including the moment of writing this letter, I have lost nearly 6 months of my life. It all started two weeks after using the mushrooms. I started suffering from panic attacks, nightmares and other unpleasant experiences. My perception of the world around me had totally changed. I did not feel I was really myself any more. It felt as if I was an observer of my own body, looking down upon myself from on high. I asked myself the weirdest of questions, which led to attacks of anxiety and panic like: 'Who am I now?', 'Why am I here?', 'I am really only a cluster of cells.' All these thoughts didn't really make me happy. I have conquered that fear now, but I still have a bad, uncanny feeling.

2. Scary mushrooms

I am a 17 year old boy and I have a problem.

Shortly before the new year started, I used magic mushrooms with a friend of mine. Ever since then, up to and including the moment of writing this letter, I have lost nearly 6 months of my life. It all started two weeks after using the mushrooms. I started suffering from panic attacks, nightmares and other unpleasant experiences. My perception of the world around me had totally changed. I did not feel I was really myself anymore. It felt as if I was an observer of my own body, looking down upon myself from on high. I asked myself the weirdest of questions, which led to attacks of anxiety and panic like: 'Who am I now?', 'Why am I here?', 'I am really only a cluster of cells.' All these thoughts didn't really make me happy. I have conquered that fear now, but I still have a bad, uncanny feeling.

Activity 1 continued

Think of the two people underlining these texts.

What was important for the first person?

What was important to the second person?

This activity shows that what you underline or highlight depends upon your reason for reading the text.

Sometimes there are questions at the end of a text and these usually indicate what is important.

It is a good idea to read the questions first and then the text. Then you can underline the answers to the questions, or you can use a different colour for each question.

Which question belongs to which underlined text?

- (a) How long did the boy suffer from the ill effects of the magic mushrooms?
Text 1 or 2 _____

- (b) What effects did the magic mushrooms have on the boy?
Text 1 or 2 _____



Activity
continued



Activity 2

Read the text below and underline the most important words, but **not more than 3 or 4!**

Life among the Elephants

In the foothills of the Kilimanjaro, in the Kenyan wildlife park of Amboseli, there live some one thousand elephants, divided over 50 herds.

For over twenty years Cynthia Moss has been studying the elephants in this paradise valley. The animals have become accustomed to her and her Land Rover, which enables her to literally live among the herds. She herself claims she recognises 750 elephants at a glance and she calls out her objects of study by name.

If you can, compare your work with a colleague. Have you underlined exactly the same words?

If you have underlined different words, can you explain why?

Activity 3



- Choose something that you have to read for your work and underline or highlight the most important words and/or sentences.
- What is the main point that the writer is trying to make? (The title can sometimes be a good clue.)
- Use a dictionary to look up any difficult words.
- Using your underlined words, try to explain what the text is about. This can be done in a group or you could work with a friend.

This process will help you to check that you have indeed underlined the main points and will also help you to remember them.



What do you think?

Evaluation Questions

Have these activities helped you to identify main points in a text?

How can highlighting and underlining help you to remember information?

Will you try any of these suggestions the next time you have to read something?
When might they be useful to you?

ASKING AND ANSWERING QUESTIONS



This section will help you to:

- **ask and answer questions when reading a text**
- **recognise the difference between research and reflective questions**
- **decide whether or not a question is relevant**
- **make up your own questions for a text or article**
- If you are reading something interesting that you may want to remember later, you can ask yourself questions about the text and then try to answer them in your own words.
- When you ask questions, you are more likely to read sections of the text again and to think about the main points being made. This process helps you to **understand** and **remember** it better.
- When you are studying, or completing assignments, you are often asked questions about what you have read. These questions can hint at what is important in the text and help to focus your reading. Try reading the questions first and then keep them in mind whilst you are reading.
- If you are gathering information on a subject and plan to read some articles, make up a list of questions on what you want to find out. These can also help to focus your reading and prevent you from being distracted by information which is not relevant.

There are different types of questions, looking for different types of answers.

Research questions look for a precise answer, usually factual information, that is included in the text you are reading.

Reflective questions look for answers that are not literally found in the text, but that you need to think about in relation to what you have just read.

The following activities show you how to distinguish between research and reflective questions.



Activity 1

Read the text. At the end you will find two research questions. The answers are in the text.

Spanish Sun, Sea and Sand

The Costa del Sol has become one of Europe's most popular holiday destinations. Sun lovers from all over Europe are attracted by the all year round warm temperatures, the Mediterranean Sea and the sandy beaches. The Spanish economy is very dependant on the tourist industry and what were once small fishing villages on the Mediterranean coast, are now large bustling towns full of hotels, apartments, night clubs, bars and restaurants.

1. What attracts tourists to the Costa del Sol?

2. Where can people find work in the large Spanish resorts?

Activity 2

Read the text and answer the following questions. Notice that question 2 asks you for information not included in the text. This is a reflective question.



Children are Addicted to Computer Games

The introduction of computer games has dramatically changed the playing habits of children today. Most households with children aged between 5 and 15 have some form of electronic games consol. Researchers have found that some children are spending as much as six to eight hours a day playing these games, which means that they have less time for other activities or sports. Doctors are concerned that children are not getting enough exercise, and as the games can be played alone, some children are cutting themselves off from friends and not developing their social skills. These changes in playing habits may cause problems for children in later life.

1. How do these new patterns of play affect children's development?

2. What sort of problems might computer addicts have in the future, if they continue to spend so much time playing these games?



Activity 3

Read the questions before you start reading the text. Next read the text quickly - try to find the answers to the research questions as fast as possible. Then answer the reflective questions.

1. When was the last time that Scotland had its own parliament?
2. Where is the new Scottish parliament situated?
3. What responsibilities does the new Scottish parliament have?
4. What effect will the new parliament have on the Scottish people?

Scotland Votes for a New Parliament

In 1999 Scotland elected its first parliament since 1707. For almost 300 years Scotland has been ruled by the British government based in London but now decisions affecting the Scottish people will largely be made by the new parliament in Edinburgh. This new parliament is responsible for health, education, environmental issues, housing, local government, social work, economic development, transport and law and order. The national government in London retains responsibility for defence, foreign affairs, social security, immigration and national economic policies. The new parliament promises to be more representative of the views of the Scottish people.

Remind yourself how to recognise a **research** question, and a **reflective** question:

Research questions are easy. You take what is written in the text and turn it into an answer.

Reflective questions can be more difficult. They may start with a research question but then ask for more information. Questions often start with 'Why'?

Activity 4

Read the text and answer the questions that follow.



Big Sisters

In the United States career-women can do a remarkable type of voluntary work: acting as older sisters to underprivileged girls. Taking them around, for at least half a day per fortnight, to show them that there is a world outside the ghetto.

This Big Sister Programme has proven to be very good for the girls, and also for the Big Sisters themselves. One Big Sister commented, 'What did I used to do on Saturday afternoons? Shopping on Fifth Avenue.'

source: Opzij, nr. 3, 1997, The Netherlands

1. Who are the Big Sisters?
2. Which girls was the Big Sister Programme developed for?

Make up a reflective question that is linked to the previous ones.

Now answer your question:



Activity 5

Read the following text and answer the research and reflective questions which follow. Now make up some questions of your own for this text that will help you to understand and remember what you have read.

Springtime fatigue?

Some doctors say springtime fatigue does not exist, but many people seem to suffer from it, a feeling of listlessness and tiredness, with no energy for anything. One cause may be a combination of a lack of sunlight and the typical winter fare: more fat and fewer vitamins. So, don't go to the doctor for a cure. Consult yourself and pay a visit to your greengrocer.

source: Mes en Vorkî, nr. 14, 1997, The Netherlands

1. What is springtime fatigue?
2. Why might doctors say that it doesn't exist?

Now make up your own questions and write them here:

- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

So far the texts used have all been short. Longer texts can be harder to get to grips with.

Not everything that is written in a text is important and if there are no questions at the end to guide you, it isn't always clear what is important and what is not.

First think about why you are reading the text and why you want to (or have to) remember things.

Activity 6

Choose something that you have to read for your work.

What is it and why are you reading it?

Make up some **research and reflective questions** that will help you to understand and remember what is important about this text.





What do
you think?

Evaluation Questions

Did this approach to reading work for you? Why, or why not?

Will you use some of the suggestions in these activities to focus your reading? If so, which ones?

TAKING NOTES



In this section you will:

- practise different ways of taking notes
- find out why good notes can be useful

Do you sometimes have to take notes? If so, when?

Do you want to learn how to take notes?

How can learning to take good notes help you?

Remember: You can take notes from a written or a spoken text.

You can take notes for different reasons:

To help you remember Writing things down can help you to remember them because you need to select what to write down. If you then read your notes again later the same day, you will increase your chances of remembering the information.

To help you concentrate Taking notes, means you are more actively involved with the information available because you have to sift, select and understand the material in order to write down the relevant points.

To provide a record If you have notes, you can go back, refresh your memory and look up anything you have forgotten. But how much do you need to record? The trick is to write down just enough to remind you. Most people write too much.

To work out a plan for a piece of writing - a letter, report or essay, or to prepare a talk. These may be pattern notes to explore a topic or linear notes to plan it out step by step.

Can you think of any other reasons you may have to take notes?

Remember: Thinking about **why** you take them, will help you to make useful notes. If you have taken any notes recently, write here why you made them and what you used them for.



What do you think?

What do you find difficult about taking notes?

Presenting your notes

Good notes should be clear and concise. They should also be easy to read and understand (otherwise you won't want to be bothered looking over them again). You should organise your notes to suit the way you learn. Your notes should only contain the information that you need. If you set out your notes in a striking way, you will be better able to remember the information.

Different types of notes

There are a number of different ways of making notes, so it's up to you to decide which method suits you best, that is, suits your way of working. You may want to use a combination of methods.

Guidelines for Taking Notes

These are only guidelines. You will find your own way of taking notes - one that works best for you. How you do this will depend on you, on the material and on the purpose of the notes.

1. Don't take notes on your first reading of a text. Read first, then go back, and only note the most significant points.
2. Don't take too many notes.
3. Use your own words.
4. Use abbreviations.
5. Don't use complete sentences. Use **key words**.
6. Use headings/titles.
7. Make main points stand out. (See **Underlining and Highlighting** section of this pack)
8. Try using mind-maps and symbols. (See **Mind Maps** section of this pack)
9. Number your points.
10. Lay out your notes clearly, so that you will be able to understand them later.
11. Take note of sources and page references, in case you want to find the text again.
12. Store notes where you can find them easily. (See **Storing Information** in this pack)

How can you make headings and important points **stand out**?

Underlining

CAPITALS

Highlighting

Leaving space around

****Using stars****

Abbreviations

Cut down words you use regularly: ed. for education, gov. for government

You can invent your own abbreviations.

Write down some words you use often and try to find useful abbreviations for them:

--

Use standard abbreviations:

e.g. - for example, p. - page ; cf. - compare

Or common abbreviations: dept., E.U., M.P., etc.

Look for abbreviations in newspapers or books. Look them up in the dictionary, if you don't know what they mean.

Symbols

Symbols are easy to use. They are a kind of shorthand. Here are some examples.

You can also make up your own.

> bigger than

< smaller than

= that is

is not the same as

~ approximately

-> result

/ or

Practising Taking Notes

Do you have difficulty taking notes?

Do you have a problem deciding which issues are important and which are not important?

The following activities will give you some practise in finding main points and ideas:

Start with taking notes from a written text.

If you want to take notes you must be able to find out what is **important** in a text and what is not:

Sometimes your tutor will tell you what to look for.

Sometimes there will be questions after the text to guide you.

Sometimes you know yourself, as you are looking for specific information.

You have to start by distinguishing between **main points** and **supporting details**.

How do you do that?

When you read a passage ask yourself:

What is this text about?

What is the subject? (the title or heading can often help).



Activity 1

Look for the subject in the following text and underline it. (one word only !!)

A growing group of women are mopping and scrubbing in other people's houses. When they were children they never dreamt of being cleaners, but one day it just started. What do they think about this hard work that they do in addition to study or caring for their families ? "Lately I wonder more often: how much longer can I cope?"

source: Opzij, nr.4, 1997, The Netherlands

Activity 2



Activity

Now look for the subject in this text. **Underline one word only.**

Women are not spread evenly throughout the labour force. They are concentrated in low status, low skilled and low paid jobs. Largely because of their domestic situation, they are much more likely than men to take part-time employment which is usually unskilled and poorly paid. The American sociologist Theodore Caplow argues that the main reason for the position of women in the labour market is the belief of employers that they will leave work to produce and raise children. This means that employers will not normally invest money in expensive training programmes for female workers and will make sure they are easily replaceable. This results in women being placed in low skilled jobs which can be learned quickly. These jobs are usually poorly paid.

This time underlining one word is **not enough**, if you want to note what this text is really about.

Read the passage again and underline the most important words, but **not whole sentences.**

Now try to write out some notes:

Subject:

Most important words:



Activity

Activity 3

Now do the same with the text about the cleaners (did you underline that word?)

Subject:

Most important words:

Read the guidelines on *page 204* again. Do you want to change any of the notes you have taken?



Activity

Activity 4

Try making a diagram (tree or spider) on one of the texts above. If these words don't mean anything to you, see **Arranging Diagrams** section of this pack.



Activity

Activity 5

Select something that you have to read or ask your tutor for something to work on.

Try making your own notes using any of the methods mentioned in this section.

Evaluation Questions

Have you changed the way you take notes?



What do you think?

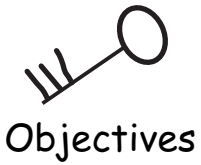
Can you use any of the suggestions in this section? If so, which ones?

Do you think that taking notes will be easier from now on? Why? or, why not?

Another important part of taking notes is how you organise and store them so that you can find them again when needed.

See **Storing Information** in this pack.

ARRANGING DIAGRAMS



In this section you will:

- practise making different types of diagrams
- discover how organising and categorising can help you to understand and remember

When you read a text, you may want to remember parts of it. You could try to learn the text by heart, of course, but this is not making the best use of your time.

How do you remember things?

Have you devised your own method?

Look for the section on **Learning, Memorising and Understanding** in this pack if you want to know more about this.

There are various ways of remembering things. One possibility is arranging information in a way that makes it easier for you to recall.

Activity 1

Read the first column of words twice. Turn the paper over and write down as many words as you can remember. Then try again with the second column.



table	table
tree	chair
grass	cupboard
car	bench
girl	tree
everywhere	branch
telephone	leaf
knife	trunk
book	cow
red	sheep
stone	goat
piano	pig

Which column did you remember best? Why is that?

In the second column the words that belong together are grouped together making them easier to remember.

Such lists of words (e.g. cow, sheep, goat, pig) can be given a collective name, in this case, animals.

Another word for a collective name is **category**. So, you can categorise words and texts.



Activity

Activity 2

Make a list of words that belong in these two categories:

Individual sports	Team sports



Activity

Activity 3

Make up collective names for these two categories:

Liz Taylor
Sally Fields
Jane Fonda
Susan Sarandon

Margaret Thatcher
Golda Meir
Indira Gandhi
Benazir Bhutto

There are various ways of arranging things:

- You can just put them in lists as you have done so far.
- You can group things using **brackets: }**.
- You can subdivide categories and make that clear by using brackets:

Strauss
Haydn } **composers**
Mozart

Rembrandt
Vermeer } **painters }** **creative artists**
Van Gogh

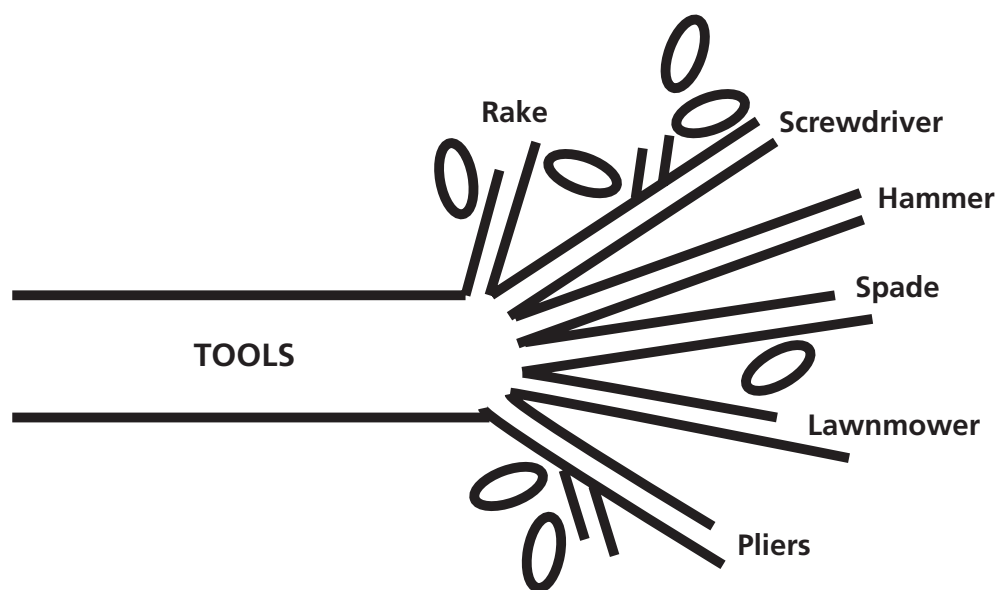
Shakespeare
Amis } **writers**
Rushdie

Diagrams

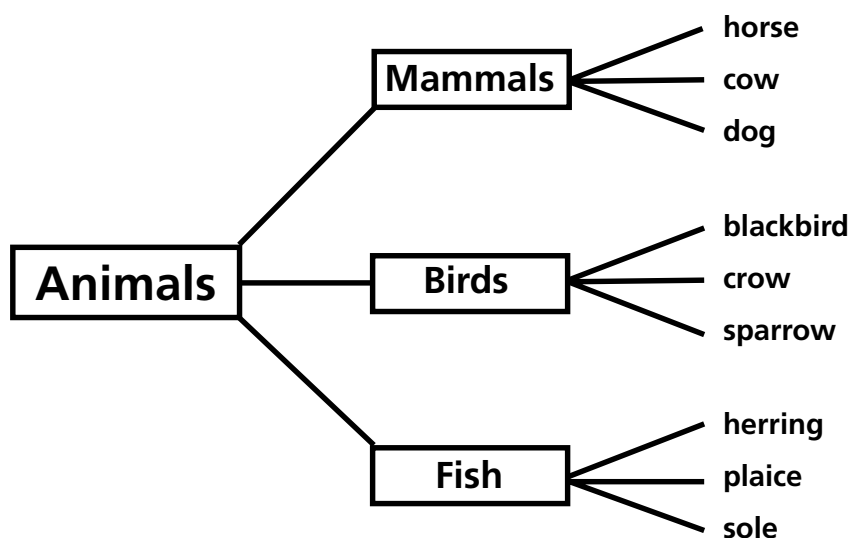
Another way to arrange information is by means of a **diagram** (e.g. a tree diagram, spider diagram).

Tree Diagram

Here you see a fallen tree; in the trunk you write the **collective name** or the **category** and in the branches the things that belong to it:



The bigger branches can have twigs, so that you can subdivide the categories even further and write them in a diagram.



Activity 4

A family tree is a good example of a tree diagram.

Read the text and try to put the family relationships in a **family tree**.

I have been living in Great Britain for quite a time now, but my in-laws still have difficulty pronouncing my name properly. Even my own husband John prefers to say "darling" instead of Saskia. When my parents-in-law baptised their children, I don't think they used much imagination, or are the names John, Jim and Mary something special? That really is the only problem I have with my family. Sister-in-law Liz especially, was a great help in the beginning and she is very good with our children Joel and Diana. I think she invites them over so much because she and Jim don't have children. I don't see Mary very often, because she is very busy with her job and the three kids. Her husband Robert doesn't do anything to help her. "Sally can help, she is old enough", he says, but a 14 year old can't look after two little boys all the time. "Angus is all right", Sally told me once, "but Richard is a!" I won't repeat that.

Draw a family tree with the names from the story, starting with the grandparents.

Activity 5

Try arranging some of your own work into a spider diagram.





What do you think?

Evaluation Questions

Will you use diagrams to help you organise your work?

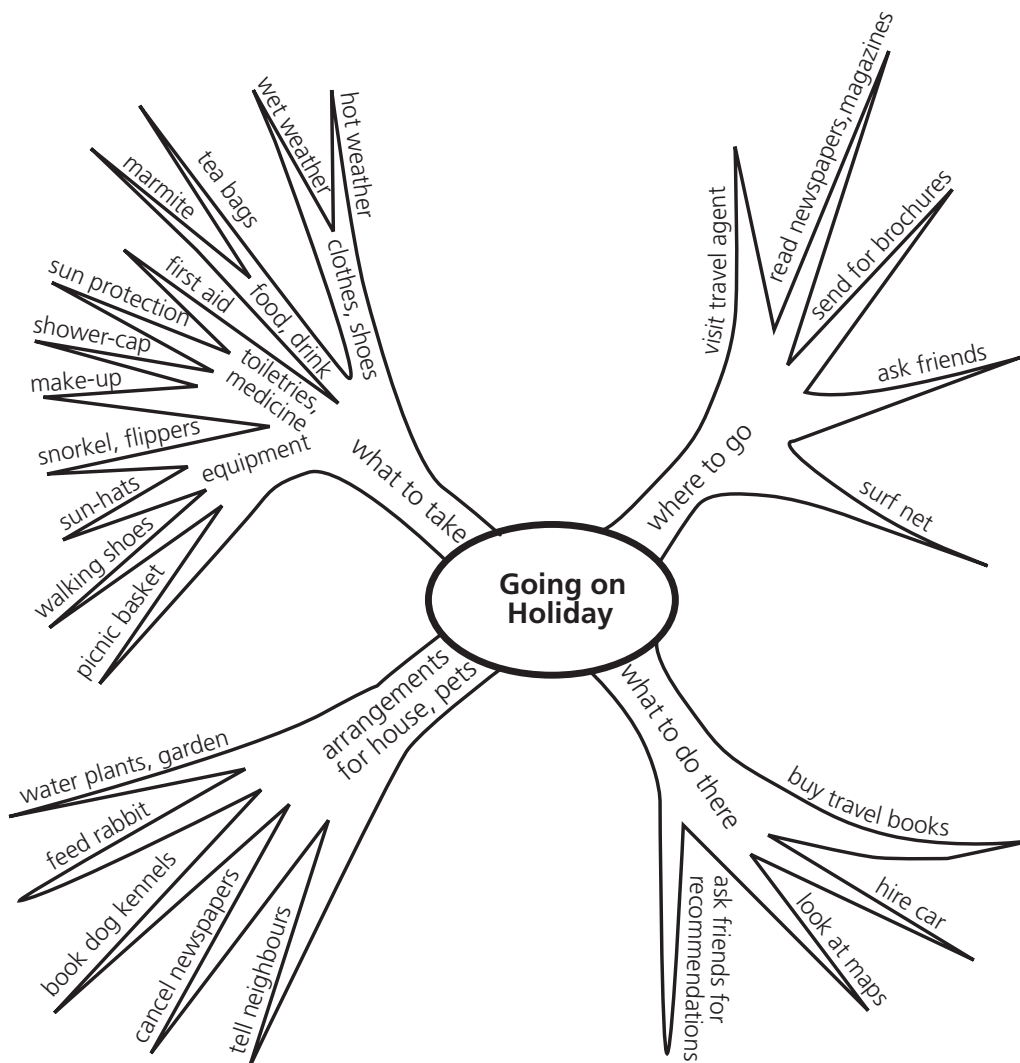
Which methods have you tried?

How have they helped you?

MIND MAPS

This section gives you the chance to try:

- different ways of recording and organising information
- being creative in the way you can link ideas together
- comparing this method of note taking to any others you may have used



What is a Mind Map?

It is a powerful graphic way of summarising information, opinions or thoughts on a single page, using key words, colours, symbols, numbers and pictures so that:

- You have an overview of a large topic or subject
- Connections can be easily seen
- Vital information is not overlooked
- A large amount of information is presented in a small space
- The writer can follow and extend each train of thought more easily
- The notes are attractive and interesting to look at and therefore easier to remember

Mind Maps could be likened to Road Maps - both contain information to help you make choices. The subject is always at the centre of the map.

Like a road map it will contain:

- Key words** A single word on which the meaning hangs and answers the question 'What is this about?' (more about this later)
- Colours** Different areas of thinking can be mapped in different colours for easy identification.
- Symbols** eg @, ↘, , can say more than words sometimes and are faster.

Why make notes?

You make notes to help you:

- **understand the meaning**
- **concentrate**
- **remember**
- **pull ideas together**

When you make notes, they are usually just for your own use, so you don't need to worry if anyone else understands them.

Whether you are listening or reading, you need to ask yourself constantly:

- **What is this about?**
- **What do I want to remember?**

Make a **Mind Map** by recording your answers to these questions and see if you can make your note taking more interesting and effective. This will help you to find out if Mind Mapping is for you!



Activity

Activity

To make a Mind Map

You will need:

1. a pencil
2. a black pen with a thin nib for writing
3. colours - felt tip pens are fine
highlighters are useful
4. paper - white, blank, unlined
A4 is excellent, A3 if you want to make a large map

Remember!

- Be clear about your purpose in making the mind map
- Gather as many facts as possible together before you begin
- Start at the centre with an image and work outwards
- Select and print the key words
- Give each word its own line
- Make each line the length of the word - this saves space
- Connect each line letting them radiate out from the central image like a tree - thick at the base and becoming thinner as it radiates
- Make up your own colour code.

How to make a Mind Map

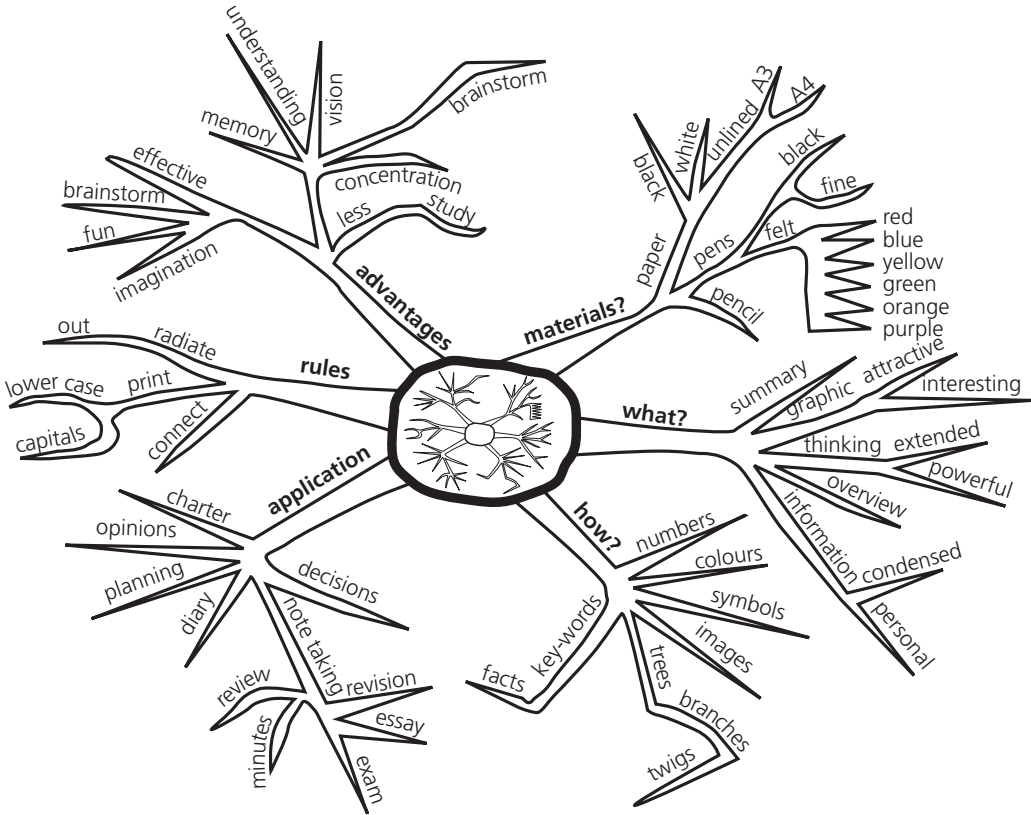
- Place your paper horizontally.
- Draw a bold image in the centre to represent your subject. Make it about as long and wide as your small finger. Use colours to make it stand out as the central feature of the map.
- Decide how many supporting topics/headings you will have and colour code each.
- Draw and colour one tree trunk connected to the central image for each heading/key word and label them.
- Draw and colour branches on each trunk to carry supporting information and label them.
- Draw twigs on your branches where there is further supporting information and label.
- Use images, numbers or symbols wherever possible instead of words.

It is unlikely that your first attempt will be perfect, so you will probably want to do it all again clarifying images, making it neater and more beautiful!

This serves to reinforce the learning so the more times you need to redo it, the more likely you will be to remember it.

Have fun!

Mind Map on Mind Maps



Evaluation Questions

Do you think that Mind Maps are a useful way of organising information?

Can you say why, or why not?



What do you think?

In what ways might mind maps help in the work you are doing?

How do Mind Maps compare with other forms of note taking that you have used?

SUMMARIES

How To Study A Text

Throughout this chapter, you have been introduced to a number of methods to help you understand texts. This section will let you practise what you have learned.

If you have any doubts, then look back at the different sections:

- **Reading Critically**
- **Reading for Different Purposes**
- **Asking and Answering Questions**
- **Taking Notes**
- **Main Points**
- **Arranging Diagrams**
- **Mind Maps**

Choose something that you have to read for your work. Give yourself a challenge and select something that you find quite difficult, but not too long.

To take a good look at a text and to understand it better, work through the following steps:

1. Read the text.
2. Look at each paragraph and decide what it is about.
3. Determine what the main point of the text is.
4. If you do not know the meaning of some words, look them up in a dictionary.
5. Underline or highlight important words or sentences, or make mind maps or diagrams of the ideas presented.
6. Make up questions for each paragraph to help you understand them.
7. Answer your questions.
8. Write a summary of your text.

- 1. Read the text**
- 2. Write down what each paragraph is about**

Paragraph 1:

Paragraph 2:

Paragraph 3:

Paragraph 4:

3. Decide for yourself what the text is about

Where in the text is its main subject?

The text is about:

Think of a good title for this text:

4. If you find some unknown words, look them up in your dictionary

5. Underline or highlight any key words or phrases, or make a spider diagram or mind map of the main ideas included in the text.

6. **Now make up questions for each paragraph.** If you do not remember how to do this, look back at **Asking and Answering Questions**.

Paragraph 1:

Paragraph 2:

Paragraph 3:

Paragraph 4:

7. Now try answering your questions in your own words

Paragraph 1:

Paragraph 2:

Paragraph 3:

Paragraph 4:

8. Write a summary of your text



What do you think?

Evaluation Questions

Did this process help you to understand your text?

Which methods will you use again in your work?

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Few ideas are completely new and we should like to acknowledge the origin of some of the ideas which we have used and adapted in this pack:

The idea of the Thinking Hats exercise originates with *Edward de Bono*.

The idea underlying the Learning Styles exercise comes from *Honey and Munford's "Using Your Learning Style"*.

We have to thank *Markwort : Kouluttajan udet vanteet* for the idea of the seven intelligences exercise.

Mind maps originated with *Tony Buzan* in *"Use Your Head"*.

We should also like to thank the tutors and students in our own organisations for their helpful comments and suggestions on all aspects of these packs.