

## How I take notes



I used to struggle with note-taking, mainly because my wrists can sometimes hurt from writing, and often I am a slow writer. I explored different techniques, and the one that works best for me is taking notes via *Microsoft Word* or *Apple Pages* (if you do not have these, use whatever is equivalent).

My font of choice is “Times New Roman”, which is often the suggested font for academic writing, according to the American Psychological Association (APA) (2019a). I also ensure that the spacing is 1.5. The font and spacing are recommended to promote readability and resolution. APA noted that this can support “people who use assistive technologies”. Double line spacing can be used for titles and footnotes (APA, 2019b). Applying these standards for academic papers to note-taking can help one get used to the format outside of academia.

I read the course module learning objectives and outcomes. I write those down on the first page of my note-taking document. This would help with the end-of-module assignment, the mid-module assignment and/or collaborative learning question.

Then I ensure that the page numbers are included so that I organise a list of page numbers for each module after I complete the objective list. This helps with staying organised and knowing which reading materials belong to which unit.

Each page after that will include the reading materials. I correctly reference (APA for psychology) in the material (as the title). I make the font size 14 and the text in bold. Then, with the font size 12, I initially copy and paste what I want to include from the material, then shorten it and review the notes once I am satisfied. Everything that is paraphrased or written in my own words is italicised

(alternatively, you can write your own words with a different coloured text). Sometimes, taking screenshots of diagrams or tables and including them in your notes is useful in order to provide further context.

For a module like biological psychology, where abbreviations are common, I like to create a glossary list after my learning objectives and page number pages. Alternatively, I write them down in a notebook to make referencing easier and quicker.

Other note-taking platforms include *Google Keep* (a Chrome extension that “allows you to save articles you find online, which you can then include in a Google Document), *SimpleNote*, or *AirTable* (provides a study guide template) (Wallis, 2017). *Notion* is a MacBook application that you may install for note-taking, which has a toggle option and a to-do list.

Using these methods significantly helped me with assignments and improved my grade. I hope this helps you too.

I also recommend reading [this article](#) by the University of North Carolina (n.d.) or [this article](#) by Saballa (2021).

### **Different study techniques:**

#### *Pomodoro Technique:*

1. **Study** for 20 minutes (set a timer). You may use the app “**Hold**” to set a timer and earn points. You may also use the “**Pomodone**” app, which sets a timer that follows the technique. The Pomodone app includes other features like a to-do-list and EverNote.
2. Note any distractions to avoid them
3. Take a 5 minutes **break**
4. **Repeat** 1-3 (Ellet, 2016)

#### *Cornell Method*

#### *T.H.I.E.V.E.S Reading Technique*

#### *Feynman Technique* (helps with memory recall):

1. **Write** the concept on paper
2. **Explain** the concept to someone or something (i.e. a teddy bear, pet), as if you were a teacher
3. **Review**

4. **Explain** again without consulting materials and using complex language

**PQ4R Method:**

1. **Preview:** Skim-read to see the “big picture”
2. **Question:** What does the chapter explore?
3. **Read:** Understand the topic
4. **Reflect** on the questions
5. **Recite:** Summarise in your own words
6. **Review** until you are confident (University of Potomac, 2022)

**The Distributed Practice:** Improves “memory retrieval, repeated practising of skills and practice testing” and improves “perceptions and attitudes toward the subject” (Benson, Dunning & Barber, 2020).

1. **Review** older materials and practice what you’ve learnt
2. **Study** for 50 minutes each day
3. Take a 10–15 minutes **break**
4. Come back to the same or new topic (Alriche, n.d.).

**Other study tips:**

1. Make sure you get enough **sleep** so that you can absorb information better and regulate your brain and immune system (Newsham, 2022).
2. **Do not study on your bed.** You'll feel relaxed and your brain won't retain any information (Robben, 2016)
3. Do not have your phone near you or any other **distractions** (can put on do not disturb mode). You may use a timer for breaks, however. If possible, be in a distraction-free zone like a library (Alriche, n.d.; David *et al.*, 2014).
4. Don't listen to **music with lyrics** (instead listen to LoFi or meditation music, or environmental sounds like the rain or wind). Some suggest that listening to Mozart can increase cognition, focus and productivity. Furthermore, music, preferably **instrumental**, helps reduce stress and anxiety and can improve performance, brain function and sometimes, health (Florida National University, 2019; Verrusio *et al.*, 2015; Greenhut, 2015).
5. **Relax:** Do yoga/meditate/exercise before studying

6. Find out your studying learning style through the **VARK questionnaire** and explore which studying technique works for you.

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