

Note taking, note making

Note taking

There are a number of ways to structure note taking – the key word being ‘structure’.

The first rule is to be prepared. Pupils need to:

- make sure they have completed any background reading or preparation before the lesson and have made a note of any important questions they have to be aware of;
- use either a linear or patterned format to note the main points as key words and phrases;
- use abbreviations wherever possible;
- leave out the little words such as ‘the’, ‘is’, ‘to’, but make sure they remember that ‘no’ and ‘not’ are important words;
- record numbers, names, dates and titles;
- write definitions carefully;
- record the teacher’s conclusions clearly and concisely;
- mark any points not understood;
- copy diagrams carefully;
- have a friend or classmate who will share their notes or use a piece of carbon paper to provide a second set.

Organisation of notes

If making linear notes the pupil should:

- use wide-lined A4 paper;
- leave wide margins on both edges of the sheets or divide the page lengthways and only write on two-thirds;
- leave gaps for additions or corrections;
- use coloured pens and highlighters;
- use headings and subheadings, marking subsections with letters or numbers.

When using patterned notes or spidergrams:

- use plain, coloured paper in a landscape position;
- make use of coloured pens.

For both kinds of notes:

- write only on one side of each page so that extra pages can be inserted later, for example observations of practical work, for additional reading or own thoughts;
- the aim should be to have one set of notes that ties together all the aspects of a particular topic;
- use particular colours of paper, folders or dividers for different subjects/topics;
- after the session, notes may need organising or reorganising perhaps by sorting them into: Main point > Supporting points > Summary.

For younger pupils:

- provide an overview of the topic;
- use cloze passages where key words are omitted so that the pupil has to listen, following the notes and writing in the key words then, or later;
- use a sheet, which has been structured with headings in boxes, again the pupil listens and writes in the key words;
- prepare a spidergram or concept map;
- provide a list of key words from which the pupil can choose to complete the notes;
- as for older pupils, the use of colour is important for organisation of notes.

Note making

Pupils of all ages need to know how to learn from their reading of texts. Many will find it difficult to skim and scan a page and select and process the information without specific, strategic help. They will need effective modelling of techniques for handling texts and, sometimes, constant support and reminders about the procedures they need to adopt when looking for information in books and other texts.

Once they have found the information from the page, they need to organise it in ways that will enable them to:

- sort the information;
- determine priorities;
- make considered judgements.

Putting information into their own words, rather than just copying it, is a highly sophisticated language task and therefore the more scaffolding that can be provided for them, the greater the chances for them to participate fully in activities that involve them in reading to learn.

Pupils who are making notes from textbooks should be encouraged to:

- get an overview of the chapter by reading the first and last paragraphs and by taking note of any headings, subheadings, maps, charts and diagrams, etc.
- make a note of the book, chapter and page for later reference.

Using a spidergram or a linear format, allowing space for additional information later, they should:

- think carefully about the key point as they read each paragraph – the ‘essence’ of the paragraph and what the supporting details are, and make a note, using as few words as possible.

The advantages of this approach are that:

- pupils will process the information more deeply as they think about the key points and, therefore, have a greater understanding of the text and will be more likely to remember the information in the future;
- if they have to stop part-way through the task, they just need to reread their notes before starting again
- they will end up with a summary of the chapter, which can be kept for later reference and revision.

Examples of note-making grids:

KWL Grid. This format allows existing knowledge to be used as a beginning for an investigation. Findings are summarised in the final column.

What I K now	What I W ant to know	What I’ve L earned

QUADS Grid. This builds on the KWL grid and provides an extended, more detailed approach to recording the outcomes of an investigation.

Q uestion	A nswer	D etail	S ource