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NOW YOU ARE AT UNIVERSITY ...

Active reading and note making

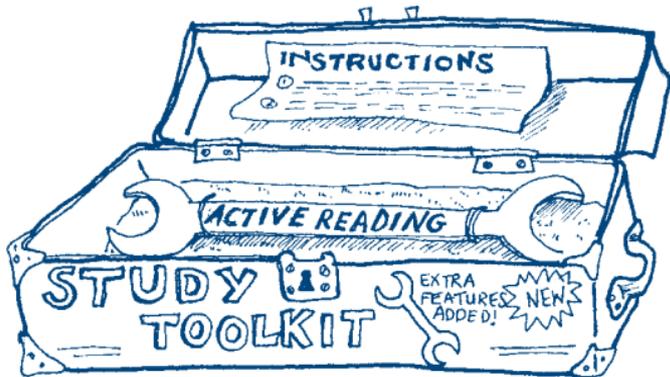
Below is a table that summarises the differences in approach between reading and making notes at school/college and degree-level reading and making notes.

School/college	University
The reading material is usually set, prioritised and managed by the teacher.	Apart from a few key texts, <i>you</i> are expected to decide what to read and what not to read. (<i>Text</i> is a general term for any type of written document – e.g. a book, article, report, course textbook. <i>Text</i> can also be used to describe speech or something visual.)

School/college	University
Generally, all students read the same texts.	Because of the choices you make, some or all of the texts you read will be different from those of other students on your course, even for the same assignment.
Students learn mainly by absorbing the information in the texts and repeating it in different forms.	You are expected to think beyond the information in the texts and to make up your own mind about <i>whether</i> the information is important, <i>why</i> it is important and <i>how</i> it connects with other information and ideas.
Although there are different reasons for making notes, the main purpose is to record information and ideas.	<p>At university there is a much wider range of reasons for making notes: for example, to jot down your own ideas on a topic, to record the details of an academic journal you have found or to make notes on your evaluation of an argument the author has put forward.</p> <p>Importantly, a key purpose of note making is to help you produce and record a clear picture, not only of what you have understood but also of your analysis and evaluation of what you have read, seen or listened to.</p>

Having an active approach

At university you are expected to develop what is called an active approach to study, and in order to do this you need to have the right tools for the job. The first tool in your study toolkit is to be aware of the main purposes of reading and note making outlined above. The second tool in the box is to understand in a bit more detail what an ‘active approach to study’ means.



Active reading and note making means that instead of passively reading and noting down, you **engage your brain and think about** the information **before, during and after** reading and making notes.

Although you might need to memorise information for some exams, your tutors generally want much more than an assignment sprinkled with remembered ideas and quotations. At university your tutors expect you to form your own informed views about a text, including how it connects with other texts and with your own ideas and knowledge.

Rather than just learning and reproducing an idea or piece of information, you should **understand it, question it, reflect on it** and then **apply it to a particular purpose**, such as addressing an assignment title.

***Before* – have a clear purpose**

Think about *whether*, *why* and *how* you are going to read something, and *whether*, *why* and *how* you are going to make notes. Always ask yourself: ‘Why am I going to read and make notes on this text and what do I hope to produce at the end?’ Don’t worry if you are a bit vague about your exact purpose at the start of your course; with practice you will be able to pinpoint a purpose for reading a text.

***Before* – make predictions**

Before you start to read something in detail, make some predictions about what you expect to find. Predictions and expectations (even if they turn out to be wrong) will help engage your brain.

***During* – build a scaffold**

Always try to link what you read to what you already know about the subject, how it relates to other topics and how it relates to your own life experience. This is important, as you need to build a ‘knowledge scaffold’ in your mind onto which you can attach new information.

During – challenge the author

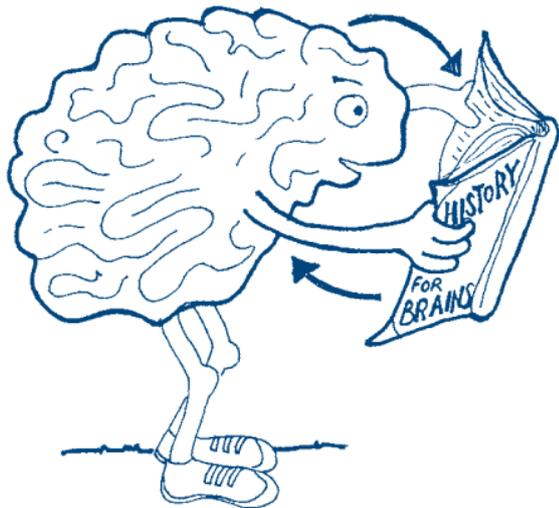
Someone wrote each text you read. Think about who they are, why they might have written their text and what you think they hoped to achieve. As you read, question and challenge the author in your mind.

During – engage and enjoy

Engage and interact with the text – there should be a continuous two-way process of reading and thinking, and of putting together old and new information to create your own unique way of thinking. React to what you read – you will enjoy it much more!

After – review it and use it

Once you have read and made notes on something, don't just put it away, never to look at it again. Review, rework, use and reuse what you have learnt and noted.



Building up your reading stamina

Reading and making notes actively and purposefully is hard work and you will probably find it difficult at first. Don't forget that the experts in the field (including your lecturers) will have read and written about the same subjects for years, and so will have developed large scaffolds which allow their brains to easily fit new information into what they already know.

Have the confidence to know that you too will gradually develop scaffolds and build up your subject knowledge. Texts that at first seem almost impossibly difficult and alien will become easier as you go forward, but only if you build up your 'reading muscles' by – you guessed it – reading. If you are finding reading a challenge, read little but often rather than in long sessions. Parts 3 and 4 give you specific strategies for building up your reading stamina.



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