

## How good are you at the moment?

### Can you read your notes?

**Yes:** The handwriting is clear all the way through.

**No:** Significant sections of your notes are not easy (or even impossible) to read. If you find it hard to write clearly when you are rushed, use this handout to find advice on how to cope better, especially in classes.

### Is it obvious what your notes are about?

**Yes:** If you are writing notes during a class, you might include headings that give the main topics and sub-topics of the lecture. If you are taking notes while reading, you might note down all the information you will need for referencing, including the author's name and title of the book or article.

**No:** There is no main heading giving the overall subject and few sub-headings identifying key issues if your notes were taken during a class. If you made the notes while you were reading, you have not included enough information for referencing. Use the handout to give you ideas about organising your notes.

### Are the main points easy to find?

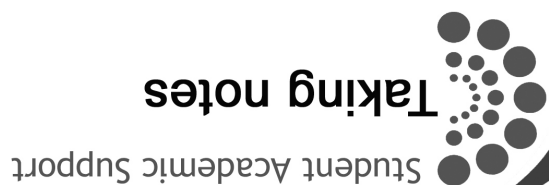
**Yes:** Your notes have an obvious structure, with the main points set out beneath clear headings and in a logical order. It is much easier to write notes like this if you already know something about the subject and are not rushed.

**No:** There is no obvious structure or order to what you have written in your notes, perhaps because you were struggling to keep up with the content of the class or what you were reading. Use the handout to find advice on how to take notes and use them effectively when you are dealing with complicated subjects.

### Have you included reminders to yourself about extra reading?

**Yes:** You clearly mark the topics that you have not fully understood or that you generally need to know more about.

**No:** You either give up taking notes completely because the content of the class or what you have been reading has become too complicated or you have left blank spaces in your notes, without writing yourself reminders of the broad subject headings that you need help with. Use the handout for suggestions on how to cope when you find yourself in this situation.



## Taking notes

### The main points

Write notes in a way that is going to be useful for you.

Do not write down everything – just the information that is going to help you most to understand a subject or to direct your reading so you can find out more about key topics on your own.

Use headings and sub-headings to make them easy to use.

Keep your notes organised.

Remember to include all the information you will need for referencing when you are taking research notes.

Improving how to take notes and taking notes that are more useful to you in preparing coursework or revising for exams takes active practice. You might get gradually better as you progress through your course. However, if you want to get better, try to find some time for deliberate practice.

### Student Academic Support

Find us on level 2 of the library.

Appointments available or drop by for quick questions

Mondays to Fridays, 10am to 4pm.

Find us on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Blackboard.

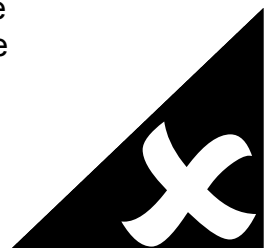
<http://www.abertay.ac.uk/studying/support/academic>

## How did you do?



If you answered 'yes' more than 'no', your notes are probably fine. Use this handout for advice on how to make your note-taking even better.

If you answered 'no' more than 'yes', you will benefit from taking time to improve the notes you take in class and while you read. Use this handout for examples of different kinds of notes and for advice on how to take notes that will be useful to you through the rest of the semester.



**Want more?** Other guides available on Blackboard from Student Academic Support that you might find useful:

- Making the most of your time

- Reading critically.

- Effective research.

- Referencing and avoiding plagiarism.

**Online:**

- **LearnHigher** is a great starting point, full of excellent resources to develop all aspects of your approach to learning - including printable timetables, coursework planners, and more.

- <http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk/students.htm>

- **University of Exeter:** taking notes in lectures and readings.

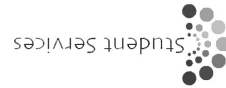
- [http://www.education.ex.ac.uk/dll/studyskills/note\\_taking\\_skills.htm](http://www.education.ex.ac.uk/dll/studyskills/note_taking_skills.htm)

- **Queens University Belfast:** another useful guide to the different note-taking techniques, including Cornell notes.

- <http://bit.ly/nMqCag>

**At Abertay:** Visit Student Services on level 2 of the library, including:

- **English as a foreign language:** Amanda Shaw - [a.shaw@abertay.ac.uk](mailto:a.shaw@abertay.ac.uk)
- **Advice for disabled students:** Claire Allan - [c.allan@abertay.ac.uk](mailto:c.allan@abertay.ac.uk)



## Student Academic Support

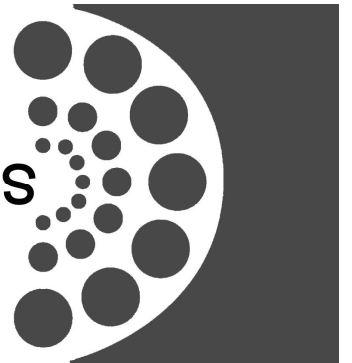
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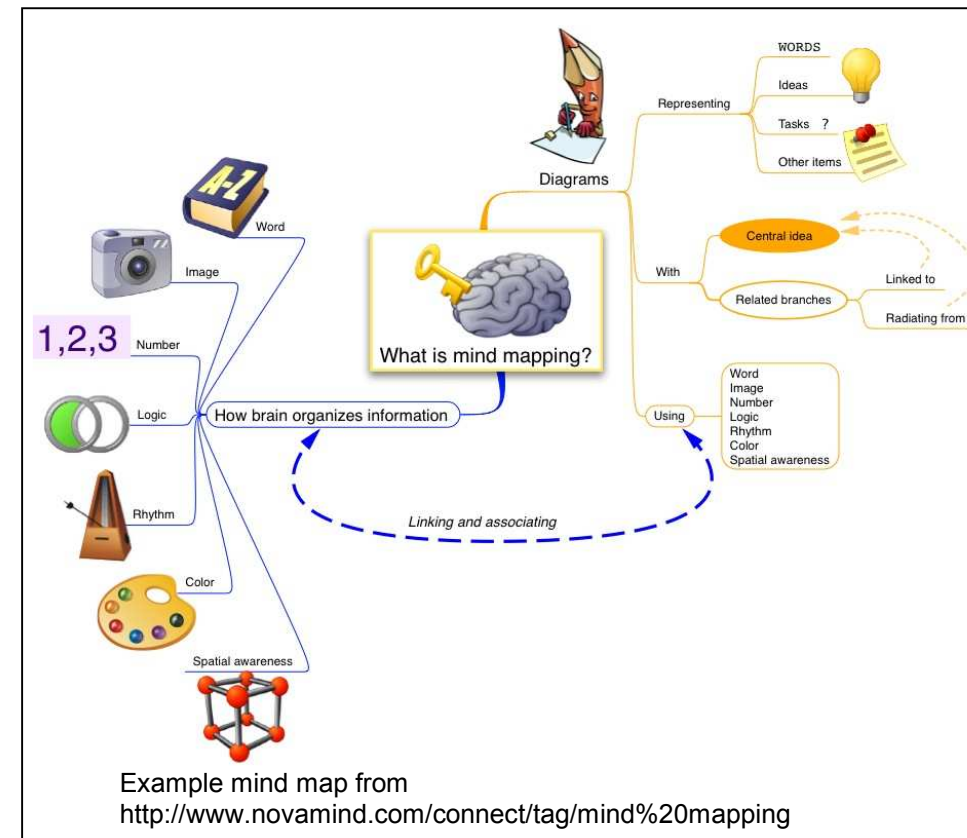


## Taking notes in difficult classes.

- **Prepare for the class.** Might be as little as finding out from the module guide what the lecturer is going to cover, or as much as doing some basic reading from a general textbook the night before - try to do as much preparation as you can find time for.
- **Think about what you most need to find information on.** Set yourself questions to focus on and try to answer while you listen to the lecture. They might be general, basic questions because you are really just starting to learn about the subject or they might be quite detailed, based on previous lectures and your reading.
- **Think about how little you need to write.** Notes that are as long as the original lecture will not be so useful afterwards. Can you write down just the answers to the questions you set yourself, plus other things that you had not thought of during your preparation?
- **Use abbreviations:** these are your notes, so save time by using abbreviations e.g. 'govt' for government or 'cttee' for committee.
- **Follow up on the main points from the lecture afterwards.** It is likely that you will not understand everything in the lecture as you hear it for the first time. What work do you need to do to before the next class to that you do understand? Read back over notes from previous classes to understand the context? Look up keywords in the indexes of general textbooks. Search reliable internet sources for basic information?
- **Review how well you have done.** How much time did the preparation take? Could you find that time routinely before every difficult class? Did trying to answer questions that you had set yourself make it easier to follow the lecture and not get worried? How clear were the notes that you took - can you still read them?

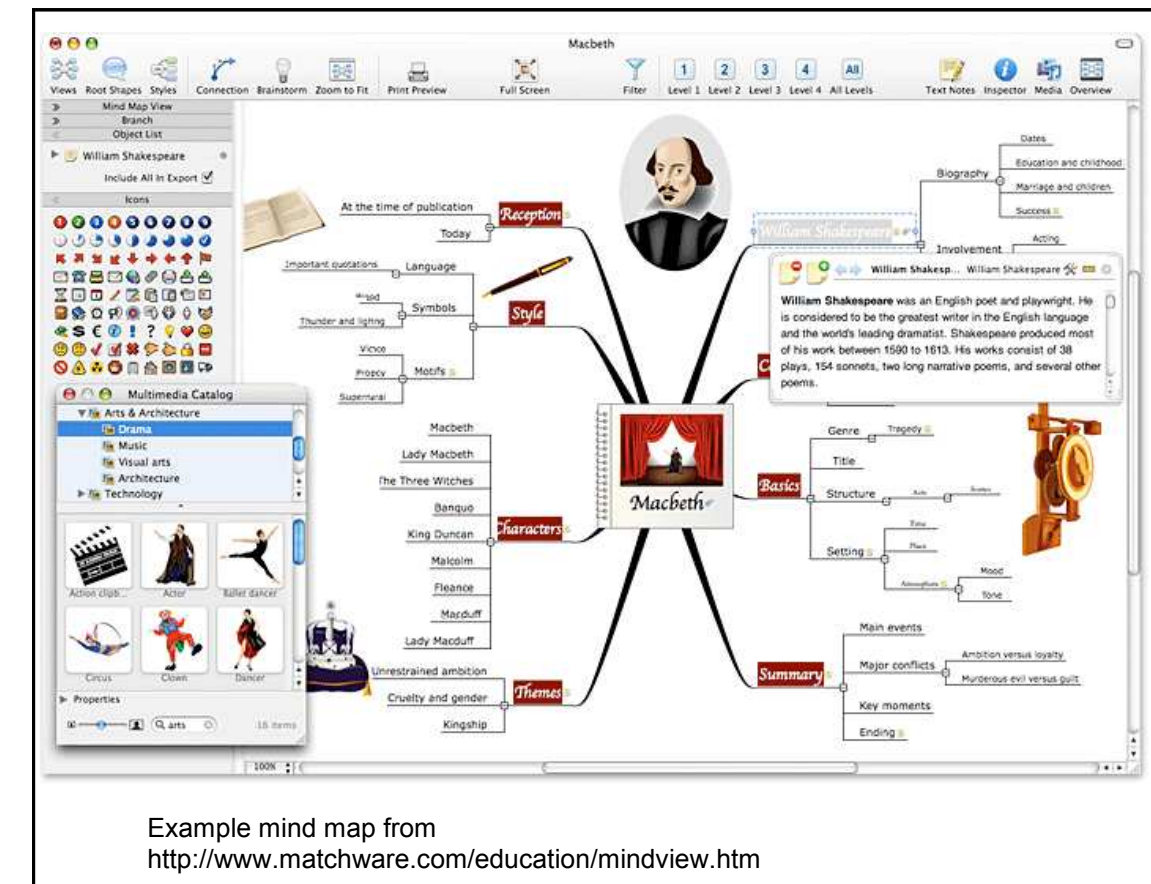
## Try mind mapping.

Mind mapping is a way of representing the ideas of a subject in a visually stimulating way.



## Taking notes while reading.

- **Check that it is worth reading.** Make sure you know why you need to read. Decide what you are hoping to find out and keep yourself focused by setting yourself questions that you want to answer. Having found something to read that looks useful, check that it really is by quickly scanning through it, looking for headings, sub-headings and keywords that seem relevant.
- **If you are not sure what counts as 'useful information',** set yourself key questions that you want answers to. Before you go into a class, check what it is going to be about and ask yourself questions that you want to have answers to before the class finishes. They might be really basic questions to help you begin to understand what the subject is about – that is just sensible and realistic. If you find yourself writing down everything you are hearing in lectures, remember that tutors generally provide a basic set of notes on the Portal that you can use as the basis for your own notes.
- **Find the useful paragraphs.** Looking through again, more slowly this time, can you find paragraphs that help you to answer your questions?
- **Do not write too much.** Can you use them to take notes that are long enough to include all the most important information but not so long they stop being helpful?
- **Review how well you have done.** Were you able to write less and spend less time taking notes because you had thought about what you were reading and why you were reading it? Did trying to answer questions that you had set yourself make it easier to find the key information? Were you able to find things that you had not thought about before? How clear were the notes that you took - can you still read them?



For more help, also see our handout on **Reading Critically**.

All networked university PCs have mind mapping software - MindView - that you can use to create mind maps, which can then be converted into different formats, including Word to use as the basis for an essay plan, and PowerPoint to help you to start to produce a presentation.