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Skills for the Workplace Outreach Program

Professional Writing Skills:

Note Taking and Academic Writing

Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives



www.uwtsd.ac.uk

Why take Notes?

- To learn about the subject - processing and interpreting ideas
- To aid concentration
- To clarify understanding - getting at the meaning behind the lecturer's words
- To help with retention of information

Taking notes turns you from a passive into an **active listener**.
Lecture notes are the starting place for:

- Assignments
- Revision

Note Taking in Class

Notes should be:

- Selective
- Relevant
- Brief and concise
- An accurate summary of key points
- Easy to make sense of in a month's time

Note Taking in Class

When you take notes, select:

- Factual information
- Main ideas
- Concepts
- Theories - note main principles; key names
- Key points of an argument

Before a Class Session

- Read ahead
- Review the previous week's slides
- Contextualise the session
- Make links and associations:
 - *How does it fit in with sessions you have had so far?*
 - *How does it relate to your own experience and knowledge?*
- List what you already know
- Make a list of questions/key points/main ideas

During a Class Session

- Write in your own words
- Use abbreviations - invent your own shorthand
- Be creative:
Use icons/symbols/pictures;
Create flow charts, mind maps
- Leave room in the margin to add your own comments, questions and criticisms

Recording Sessions

If you are allowed to record your class sessions (**always obtain your tutor's permission first!**) be sure to back up your recording with written notes - this will also help you to concentrate.

After the lecture:

- Listen to whole of the recording first;
- Identify gaps in your written notes;
- Listen through again and fill in the gaps.

To help you concentrate

Engage in a critical dialogue. Ask yourself questions:

- Do I agree?
- Is there evidence to support this argument?
- What is the basis of this theory?

Leave plenty of space for:

- Notes
- Comments
- Links to related topics
- Listen out for the main ideas and get those down
- Use visuals - icons, symbols, cartoons - to help you make associations

After a Class Session

Review your notes to:

- Check your understanding.
- Edit your notes:
- Fill in blanks - expand
- Highlight main points/ideas - look for key words and phrases
- Organise main ideas and related points into headings and sub-headings
- Identify themes, lines of argument

And finally...

- Follow up references
- Get any references you have missed from your Tutor, or a fellow student
- Check spelling of specialist terms;
- Start a glossary.
- Represent notes visually:
- Use diagrams, flow charts, mind maps and concept maps

Basic Signposting

- Signposting means using suitable linking words and phrases to help the writing flow.
- The following comprehensive list of examples should be helpful when writing assignments, (UNISA, 2017).

Basic Signposting

- Having examined..., it is now necessary to consider...
- In the above discussion....It is also important to examine/take account of/look at the evidence for...
- As outlined above...
- Issues related to this situation will now be considered, with a focus on...
- This section will ...

Basic Signposting

- A recent study suggests ...
- One important recent finding indicates that ...
- Despite these reports, other writers have proposed that
- In spite of these findings, theorists believe that ...
- This view has been rejected by some authors who claim that..

Basic Signposting

- In contrast, a recent article suggests....
- These ideas ...
- This brief outline suggests ...
- Such proposals ...
- The aim of this study is to
- In conclusion, ...
- Despite...
- In the light of...
- A recent study has found/has shown...

Using Paragraphs

Paragraphs are your best organising tool.

- A paragraph is a chunk of writing.
- As a rough guide, a paragraph is about 6-10 lines, or 200 words.
- Paragraphs give shape to your writing.
- Use paragraphs to organise your ideas.

The job of a paragraph is to:

- Introduce a main idea
- Develop an idea

Using Paragraphs

↗ Main paragraphs – one paragraph for each idea

1. idea
2. Idea
3. Idea

1. Main Idea

Point i

Point ii

Point iii

↗ Development paragraphs

- point i
point ii
point iii

Using Paragraphs

Para 1. The moon is made of green cheese

- i: colour
- ii: surface appearance
- iii: texture

Development paras:

- i. Colour – green. Cheese is often green, especially when it's old. Give examples and support from quotations.
- ii. Surface appearance - the surface has holes in it. Examples and support.
- iii Texture – soft (soft cheeses have holes in them). Examples and support.

Writing Frames

- Writing frames are useful templates that can help you get started on structuring different forms of writing.
- In the following examples, a number of alternative phrases have been given for each element of the frame.
- Use this formula to help you find your own phrases appropriate to the level you are working at.
- In this type of assignment, you are asked to discuss a topic.
- Your aim is to produce a balanced discussion so you will present arguments for and against the question.

Writing Frames

Writing frame for forming a discussion (example)

- There is a lot of discussion about whether the moon is made of green cheese.
- The people who agree with this idea, such as the many astronauts who have walked on the moon, claim that they have evidence to support their theory.
- They argue that all the holes in its surface are made by the many mice who like eating cheese.
- A further point they make is that the surface is very soft and that indeed, it is probably made of one the varieties of cream cheese.

Writing Frames

Writing frame for forming a discussion (example):

- **However**, there are also strong arguments against this point of view.
- Scientists believe that what look like holes are actually craters, possibly caused by meteorites.
- Another counter argument is that tastings of samples from the surface are not cheesy.
- Furthermore, although the moon is very old, there is no mould on its surface

Writing Frames

Writing frame for forming a discussion

Some people think that.....

because...

They argue that....

Another group who agree with this point of view are.....

They say that...

On the other hand.....disagree with the idea that...

They claim that....

They also say.....

The conclusion, therefore, is that.....

because.....

Writing Frames

Writing frame for presenting an argument:

It is thought that/This essay will argue that....

Because/This is because...

There are a number of points to make in favour of....

The reasons for thinking this are, firstly....

The reasons for taking this view are, firstly....

The reasons for taking this stance are....

The reasons for arguing this point are.....

Writing Frames

Writing frame for presenting an argument:

So/Therefore....

Another reason is....

A further line of thinking is....

Also...

Moreover...

In addition...

Furthermore...

Because...

This is a valid argument because....

References

SfWP (2018) *Complete Guide to Assignment Writing*, [online] available at https://moodle.uwtsd.ac.uk/pluginfile.php/152215/mod_folder/content/0/Advanced%20Writing%20Guides/SfWP%20Complete%20Guide%20to%20Assignment%20Writing.pdf [login required] accessed April 2018

UNISA (2017) *Research Writing* [online] available at <http://www.unisa.edu.au/ltu/students/research/writing/academic.asp> accessed April 2018