



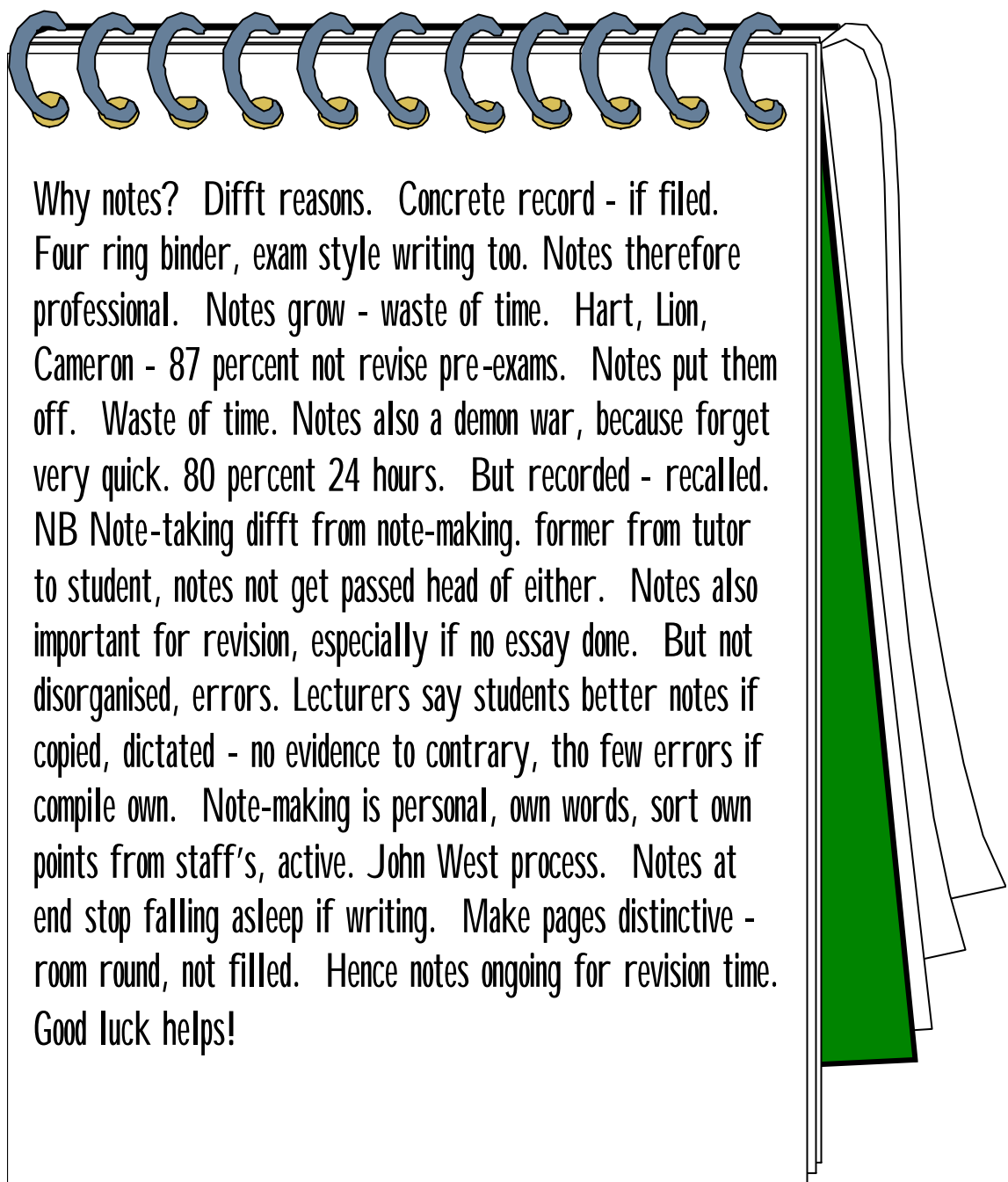
# **NOTE-TAKING**

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## INTRODUCTION

Let's begin this booklet with some notes, taken by Mr Moneypenny, from a lecture that actually dealt with 'Note taking'. Before reading on, see what you think of them as notes. Can you see any faults with them? Are there any bits you don't understand?



What didn't you understand? Many people have trouble with the 'Four Ring File', 'Hart, Lion, Cameron', 'demon war' and the 'John West Process', but, beyond this, Moneypenny's notes are deficient in other ways.

- The handwriting is not very readable.
- There is no heading (title, lecturer, date).
- They are not written on paper that can easily be stored.
- They are not set out in a helpful way, being written as one indigestible lump.
- There is no organisation: no headings, or subheadings, no indentation, no paragraphing, no numbering.
- There are some strange abbreviations (Difft – difficult, different?), whereas other words, normally abbreviated, are written out in full (percent, therefore, because).

Here is the lecture that Moneypenny attended. Read through this (it contains some good advice) and, by referring back to Moneypenny's notes, you should now be able to see where he went wrong.

### **NOTE-TAKING (a lecture by Mr A. Smithson)**

Why do we take notes? There are various reasons. They provide us with a concrete record of our coursework. Although to do this effectively they should be correctly filed and indexed. A standard A4 ring file is probably the most flexible container. Paper can be inserted or removed at will. Writing 'exam style' - that is, on one side of the paper only - has much to recommend it, encouraging the notion that your notes are always provisional, always open to development.

Notes that just grow, unchecked and unsorted, are hardly worth the paper they're written on. In one study, Hartley & Cameron found that a staggering eighty-seven percent of students, though intending to revise their notes before

an exam, did not. The notes were simply too intimidating. Obviously, this amounts to a substantial number of hours utterly wasted!

Notes are also an *aide-memoire*. Material not recorded can be forgotten in a surprisingly short time - about eighty percent in twenty-four hours, according to some estimates. Interestingly, simply recording the information - even if it is never referred to again - makes it more likely to be recalled.

More importantly, notes can become a significant part of the learning process. Some people draw the distinction here between 'note-taking' and 'note-making'. Too often in lectures, the tutor reads from his notes, the students transcribe it into *their* notes - and it doesn't pass through the heads of either! Unless students have to write an essay on a topic, many frequently give it no thought; after all, the notes are there, come revision time. But we have already seen that many never go back to these intimidating, often unreadable, often error-filled collections. Many lecturers maintain that their students take better and more accurate notes, when they are copied or dictated to them - but no, the evidence is to the contrary. That is, students make fewer errors, when they compile their own.

'Note-making' is meant to reflect this more personal, creative process. By putting material into your own words, by trying to sort out the main points from the chaff, you are being more mentally active, thus more likely to actually learn the material as you go along.

Noting is as much about *rejecting* as *selecting* information. (What we in the business call the 'John West' process!) So try to make sure you are always mentally present when you take notes. In fact, another reason for taking notes is that they can help you attend - it is much harder to fall asleep when you are writing!

Lastly, try to make your notes attractive, so that each page stands out as distinctive. And this means leaving plenty of room around them - not each page filled from top to bottom and side to side! In this way you will be encouraged to see your notes as ongoing patterns of your thoughts on a subject - open to revision at any time. Good luck - though you really help yourself!

As you can now see, Money Penny 'got the wrong end of the stick' in many regards. His notes would clearly be of little use to him. He might have been better trying to listen more carefully, asking questions when he didn't understand something. It's always worth asking yourself, what sense will these notes make in three months time? Try to identify any particular mistakes you make, and aim to rectify them in future. For instance, do you abbreviate to the point

where you can't understand what you meant? Do you forget to date your notes or to number the pages?

However, before moving on, it is worth noting that it is not always students' fault that notes are poor. Smithson's lecture is itself not very well organised, rambling between points. But practice at note-taking can help you overcome any lecturer's shortcomings, bringing out the implicit structure of their talk.

In the rest of this booklet you will be shown a number of note-taking techniques. Some of them are easier to undertake in lectures, others are better in taking notes from written sources (they are all based on Smithson's lecture, though). After this there are some specific tips on taking notes from lectures, followed by some ideas about abbreviating your notes.

# NOTE-TAKING FORMATS FOR VARIOUS OCCASIONS

## Linear Notes

- conventional
- neat
- chronological
- logical
- reflect hierarchy of points

### A. Smithson Study Skills (2) 'Note-Taking' 28.10.01

#### Why Notes?

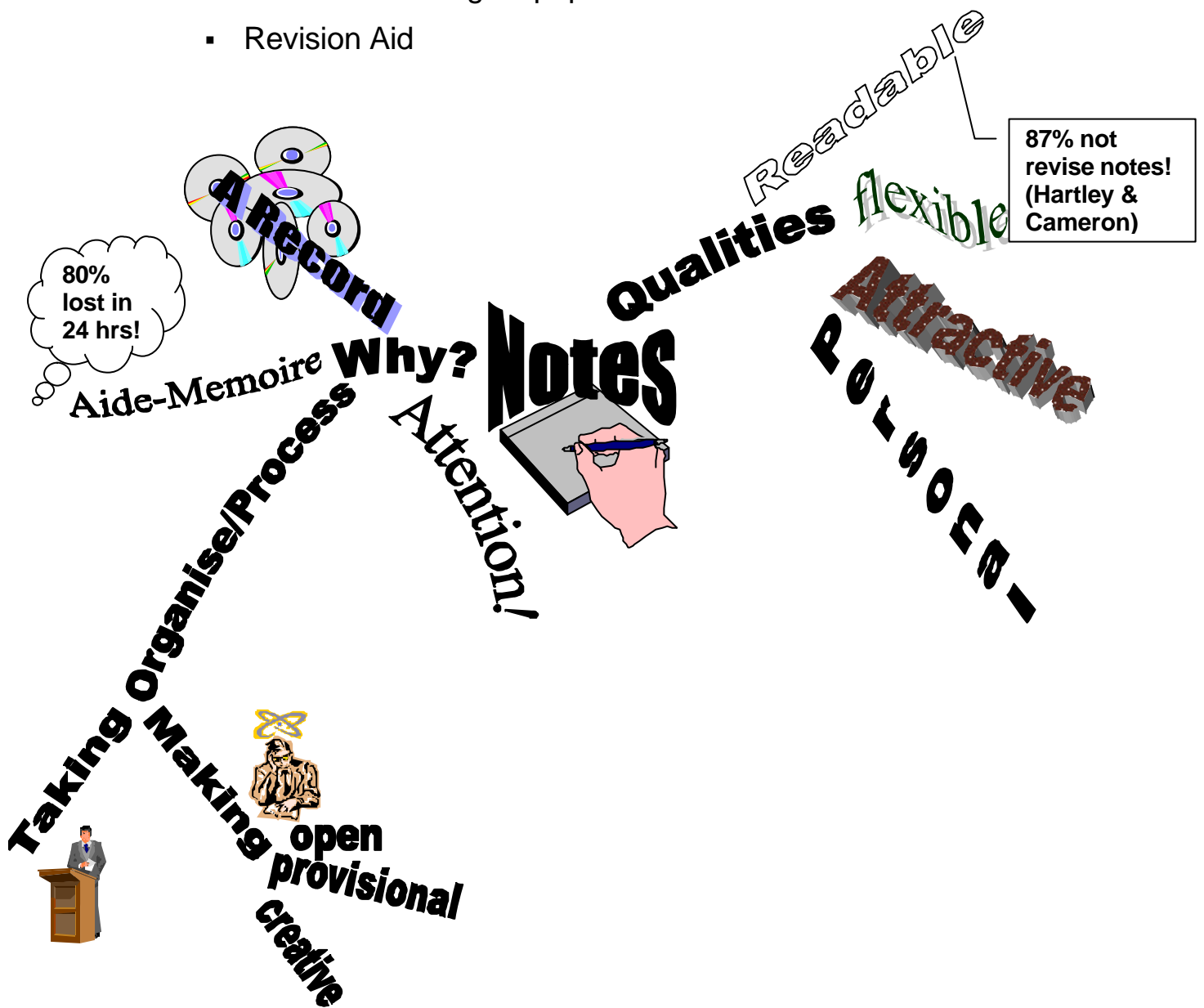
1. RECORD                      if readable (Hartley & Cameron study:  
87% did not return to notes!)
2. AIDE-MEMOIRE      est. 80% forgotten in 24 hrs!
3. ORGANISE/PROCESS THOUGHTS  
   note MAKING vs Taking. Fewer  
errors with former.
4. HELPS ATTEND

#### Qualities of good notes

1. FLEXIBILITY
2. READABILITY
3. ATTRACTIVE
4. PERSONAL

## Pattern Notes

- Open-ended
- Creative
- Flexible
- Concise
- Colourful
- Lateral
- Fun
- Good for 'thinking on paper'
- Revision Aid



## Column Method

- Separates notes from comments
- Separates key points from detail
- Makes you critical, reflective
- Minimises unintended plagiarism
- Useful in Lectures
- Allows keywording – helping you process information
- Good for revision (covering up detail)

<p><u>WHY NOTES</u></p> <p>RECORD ATTENTION MEMORY AID</p> <p>PROCESSING INFO</p> <p><u>HOW TAKE</u> NOTE- TAKING VS NOTE- MAKING</p> <p><u>FEATURES:</u> FLEXIBLE ATTRACTIVE SPACIOUS PERSONAL</p>	<p><b>Why take notes?</b></p> <p>Record of coursework, but keep flexible, A4 binder, write 1-side paper, \ open to dev't.</p> <p>Else unmanageable Hartley &amp; Cameron – 87% students didn't return to notes for revision.</p> <p>Notes also a demon war. Else material forgotten v. quick (80% - 24 hrs). Just recording helps memory.</p> <p>Notes – help learning process, if <u>Note-Making</u>. Contra <u>Note-Taking</u> = copying, dictated. Yet more errors here than when self-generated. Note-M'ing = creative, personal, active: Your OWN learning. Rejecting as much as selecting info.</p> <p>Notes also help concentration. Notes should be attractive, spacious, distinctive.</p>	<p>But was it imp? Revising for what??</p> <p>??Harrowing of Hell??</p> <p>What type of material forgotten in 24hrs? Detail, or key ideas?</p>
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As you can see, the main notes are taken in the middle column (as well as can be expected in the lecture). Later, you attempt to keyword the main points, drawing together what might have been separated in the lecture delivery. These keywords go in the left hand column. The right hand one is for your own comments or questions, arising from the lecture. This method also carefully separates out personal views from official knowledge.

### **Tabular Notes**

- Useful for codifying and categorising information
- Useful as revision aids

Types	Characteristics	Uses
Note-Taking	Copied, dictated, thought-less, passive, more errors, closed	formulae, quotes, diagrams, tables
Note-Making	Personal, inventive, creative, active, spatial, open, developing	Analysing, synthesising, evaluating, processing, learning, understanding

## **TIPS ON TAKING NOTES FROM LECTURES**

### **General Advice**

- Make sure you know what the lecture is (i.e. where it fits into the whole course, what its title is: this is often given in advance; see the course handbook).
- If you can do some general reading in advance, this will make the lecture far more digestible. You will not only be able to get more out of it, you will also be able to ask some intelligent questions (see the course 'Recommended reading', or look in the library).
- Sit near the front. Few lecturers bite!
- Watch out for lecture plans at the beginning: on a board, a transparency, or given verbally.
- Besides listening to the content, pay especial attention to both Verbal and Non-verbal clues, which indicate where the lecture is going (hopefully!).

## Verbal Clues

<i>Introduction</i>	“Today I’m going to talk about ...”
<i>Signposts</i>	“There are three key issues here. First is...”
<i>Evaluations</i>	“Most important of all...”; “What students frequently fail to understand is...”
<i>Asides</i>	“A funny thing happened on my way to the lecture theatre...” [you can put down your pen during this]
<i>Summaries</i>	“To sum up...”; “We’ve now covered ...”

## Non-Verbal & Other Behavioural Clues

<i>Material written down (e.g. on board)</i>	Quite important! Make a note of this!
<i>OHP (transparency) displayed</i>	Important! Make a note of this!
<i>Says something v-e-r-y s-l-o-w-l-y, or repeats it.</i>	Very important information: a definition, perhaps.
<i>Pauses before speaking.</i>	Definitely an important point ... or, lecturer is lost.
<i>Takes off spectacles</i>	Important point on its way, or, as below.
<i>Stares at ceiling (or elsewhere)</i>	Thinking on feet: either something profoundly original is coming (unscripted), or the lecturer is still lost.
<i>Reads from Notes</i>	Doesn’t know material very well, or is nervous. Treat him/her gently!
<i>Hides behind desk</i>	Definitely nervous.
<i>Sits on your desk/table</i>	Not nervous; in fact, rather presumptuous: lecturer is in chatty, conversational, get-to-know-the-student mode; asides are on their way.
<i>Looks round at students</i>	Questions could be coming. Be prepared!
<i>Raises finger/hand</i>	A qualification/reservation coming.
<i>Scratches head, riffles through notes</i>	Lost!
<i>Any questions?</i>	Time to pack up and leave.

## ABBREVIATIONS

If you have problems keeping up with material delivered in lectures, where you are trying to *listen* at the same time as *write*, especially where you want to take down a quotation word-for-word, and where the lecturer's sentences seem long and involved without so much as a pause between them [like this one!] ...abbreviations can be very helpful. Here are some common methods of abbreviating.

- 1. Vowel Deletion.** This method works by deleting vowels from words: Ds it wrk? Wll, cn u rd ths ok? As you can see, it is wise to keep some vowels to avoid ambiguity - as in *u* instead of *y*; or *ok* instead of *k*.
- 2. Deleting Word-Endings/Beginnings.** Here you only write as much of the word as is necessary for identification; e.g. *pos*, *neg*, *mech*, *biol*, *phone*. As you can see, some of these abbreviations eventually become the norm (e.g. *phone*). Beware ambiguities - e.g. does *prob* = *probably* or *problems*? Does *diff* = *difficult* or *different*? To overcome this problem, use the method in conjunction with No. 3.
- 3. Syllable Deletion.** You delete whatever part of a word seems redundant for recognition purposes – usually syllables, but, in this example, it has been combined with techniques from 1 and 2 as well: Delete whatvr prt tht seems redndnt for recogn purps. Thus *diffct* can be distinguished from *diffnt*.
- 4. Initial Letters Only.** Particularly useful for repeated technical terms, names, book titles and common phrases, e.g. *BTEC*, *BABA* (*BA in Business Admin*), *WS* (*William Shakespeare*), *TOTS* (*Tess of the D'Urbervilles*), *TQM* (*Total Quality Management*), etc.
- 5. Latin Abbreviations.** Less popular now than formerly, but still of use, and some crop up in everyday writing:

- |          |         |           |
|----------|---------|-----------|
| a) cf    | d) etc. | g) viz.   |
| b) c.    | e) N.B. | h) et al. |
| c) ibid. | f) i.e. | i) e.g.   |

[a) compare; b) around, about; c) in the same place; d) and so on; e) note well, pay attention to; f) that is; g) namely; h) and the others; i) for example]

**6. Symbols.** Many mathematical symbols can be used in a more general way, as can others:

- |                  |                |                  |      |
|------------------|----------------|------------------|------|
| a) =             | d) $\vee \neg$ | g) ?             | j) ~ |
| b) $\neq$        | e) > < » «     | h) $\Rightarrow$ | k) ? |
| c) $\rightarrow$ | f) &           | i) +             |      |

[a) the same as; b) not the same as/different from; c) leads to, it follows, consequently; d) increase – decrease, up – down; e) greater than – less than, much greater ...; f) and; g) therefore; h) in conclusion; i) also, plus; j) around, about; k) because]

**7. Personal Ones.** Make up your own, to shorten your most commonly used course words. Here are some that students have used, to give you the idea. The Internet and texting have added a good many more.

- |             |        |         |         |
|-------------|--------|---------|---------|
| a) ?        | d) ?   | g) o/a  | j) IOW  |
| b) $\Sigma$ | e) b4  | h) asap | k) NBIF |
| c) F        | f) w/o | i) wpb  | l) AKA  |

[a) psychology; b) Sociology; c) Philosophy; d) the; e) before; f) without; g) on account [of]; h) as soon as possible; i) waste-paper-basket; j) in other words; k) no basis in fact; l) also known as]

### Further Reading

- Adkins, Alex (1983) *Text to Note: Study Skills for Advanced Learners*. London: Arnold [371.30281 ADK]
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