# Taking notes

Southern Cross University

Academic Skills
Quick Guide

## Tips for effective note-taking

Effective note-taking skills will make it easier for you to record and recall your information for use in assignments and exam preparation. Start by using the following tips:

- Organise your notes clearly into main points and sub-points/ headings and sub-headings.
- Keep notes brief.
- Leave room to add notes later and use wide margins.
- Use colour coding, bullet points, graphics, highlighting and underlining to add emphasis.
- Always include the bibliographic details (author, date, title etc.) of your information sources so that you can find that source again.
- When you take notes for lectures/tutorials, be prepared by reading any material that is set to be read for the lecture. If possible read your lecturer's notes before the lecture (sometimes they are made available on MySCU). Also consider which learning objectives, or topics your lecture/tutorial will cover. This will help you to organise your notes by deciding what the main points will be.
- Note down any questions you might like to ask in the class. Even if you don't have the opportunity to ask, it will help you to listen out for relevant information and provide a guide for further study.
- Try using abbreviations – see the list of abbreviations at the back of this guide.

**What is in this guide**



## Note-taking techniques

There are many different ways of taking effective notes. Consider your purpose before deciding which technique is most suitable for the task.

Some popular note-taking techniques include:

- **Maps and clusters:** These are visual representations of ideas including mind maps, concept maps, spider diagrams and pattern notes. These generally start with the topic in the centre of the page and then key points, related concepts or associated ideas branch out from this. These can start as randomly placed ideas and then links, clusters and further branches can be formed by circling, colouring or drawing lines to connect associated ideas, concepts and related sources/references.
- **Lists and charts:** Turn the key points or arguments of a topic into headings and then make a list of associated ideas and concepts under each heading. This technique is especially useful when looking at pros and cons, for and against, cause and effect etc. It often helps to place the information in a table or chart to see comparisons and contrasts of ideas more clearly. You can also add a column to note down possible reference sources.
- **Concept pyramids and flowcharts:** The pyramid starts with the topic at the top and then key ideas or concepts are arranged in sequence according to their level of importance or association. Flowcharts also start with the key concept followed by a sequence of ideas.
- **Brainstorming:** Write down anything that comes to mind. Do not worry about order, quality or style. Afterwards, read back over these notes and look for key points and links, gaps or ideas that could be further explored or expanded on.
- **Question banks:** Devise a list of questions that need to be answered to tackle the task. Leave a space to add information when answers to the questions are found.

# Examples of note-taking techniques

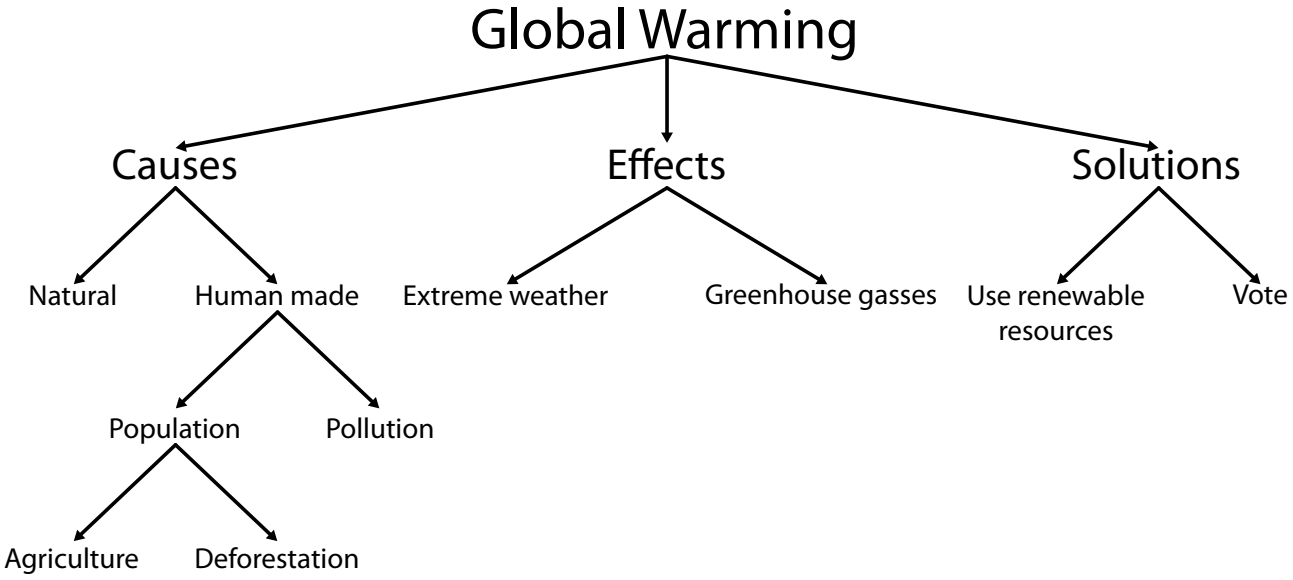
Below are two examples of how different note-taking techniques can be used to record the same information on a given topic. The assignment topic is given below, followed by the two examples.

Discuss the major causes and effects of global warming and suggest some possible solutions.

### Concept map

| Global warming | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Definition** | 'Global warming is a phrase that refers to…' | Reference source:<br>Cline, W. R. (1992). *The economics of global warming*. Washington DC: Institute for International Economics. |
| **Causes** | **Natural**<br>1. Greenhouse gas emissions from permafrost and tundra<br>2. Earth's natural climate cycle<br>**Man-made population**<br>1. agriculture<br>2. deforestation<br>3. transport<br>**pollution**<br>1. mining<br>2. power production<br>3. machinery | |
| **Effects** | **Extreme weather conditions**<br>1. violent storms and heatwaves<br>**Greenhouse gases in atmosphere**<br>1. oceanic warming<br>2. coral bleaching<br>3. polar ice pack melting<br>4. glacial retreat<br>5. tropical diseases | Shanahan, D. & Warren, M. (2009, Oct.1). PM defiant despite global warming alarm. *The Australian*. Retrieved from http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world |
| **Solutions** | 1. Vote for political climate change activists<br>2. Utilise renewable resources and non-fossil fuel power production | |

You could also display the information above graphically. (Note the outline is not complete.)



## Common symbols and abbreviations used for note-taking

| Common symbols | |
|---|---|
| → | leads to/causes |
| ← | is the result of/is caused by |
| ↑ | increase/rise |
| ↓ | decrease/fall |
| & | and |
| @ | at/amount |
| / | per |
| ? | question |
| ! | surprisingly |
| > | is greater than/more than |
| < | is less than |
| + | plus/also/in addition |
| x | times |
| - | minus |
| = | equal to/the same as/corresponds with |
| ≠ | not equal to |
| % | percentage |
| $ | dollars/money/price/cost |
| # | number |
| ~ | about/approximately |
| 2 | to/too |
| 4 | for |
| 8 | anything ending in '-ate' |
| ∴ | therefore |
| ∵ | because |
| e.g. | for example/such as |
| i.e. | that is |
| w/ | with |
| w/o | without |
| w/i | within |
| vs | versus/against |
| cf | compare |

| Common symbols and abbreviations used for note-taking | |
|---|---|
| **Common symbols** | |
| b4 | before |
| re: | regarding/referring to/about |
| cont. | continue |
| diff. | difference |
| edu. | education |
| esp. | especially |
| est. | establish |
| etc. | etcetera/and so on |
| info. | information |
| intro. | introduction/introduces |
| min. | minimum/minute |
| max. | maximum |
| Apostrophe + final letter | |
| assoc'n | association/associate |
| gov't | government |
| edu'l | educational |
| Apostrophe + 'g' for '-ing' | |
| result'g | resulting |
| estblsh'g | establishing |
| expct'g | expecting |
| Removing vowels or creating word skeletons | |
| xpct | expect |
| prblm | problem |
| bkgrnd | background |
| gvt | government |
| wds | words |
| rltn | relation |