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Skills for Computing

Topic 2:

Reading, Listening and Note-taking

Learning Outcomes for this Topic

By the end of this topic, students should be able to:

- Extract information from written and spoken sources
- Record pertinent information by taking notes

Information - 1

- Studying is based on information
- In order to study, we must:
 - Acquire (extract) information
 - Record information

Information - 2

- This topic deals with specific sources of information, and with recording information from those sources.
- Acquire (extract) information
 - By reading written sources
 - By listening (to lectures, discussions, etc.)
- Record information
 - By taking notes effectively
- We'll start at the end, with note-taking

Why take notes?

1. *To aid learning and memory*

Re-writing something helps you to internalise and to remember.

2. *To organise the information*

Sometimes the way in which information is presented in a lecture or book isn't the way that makes most sense to you. Taking thorough notes allows you to personalise the record of the information.

3. *To enable revision*

Having clear and well-organised notes saves much time when it comes to revising.

Note-taking Objectives

- Before attending a lecture, seminar or tutorial, or before reading an article or book, identify the objectives for the notes you will take.
- For example:
 - Will I need these notes for exam revision?
 - Will I need these notes for my coursework assignment?
 - What do I need/want to learn from this class/text?
- At the end of the session/task, review your notes. Have you achieved your objectives?

Exercise 1

- Decide what your note-taking objectives are for this lecture.
- Discuss these with other students in your group. Do you agree with them or not? You may now wish to change your objectives!

Approaches to Note-Taking

Two main approaches:

- **Annotating:** writing on the document itself.
 - This normally applies to written sources
 - However, in lectures you may be given handouts to annotate
 - Must use with caution unless you own the source; i.e. do not annotate books that are not yours!
- **Separate Page:** This gives more space and flexibility, but may require you to keep referring back to the original.

Tips for Annotating - 1

1. Read a paragraph or section, then go back and annotate the important points.
2. Make key points stand out clearly; use double underlining and/or asterisks
3. Use numbers if the points or argument follows an ordered progression
4. Make margin notes: use key words, one-sentence summaries etc.

Tips for Annotating - 2

5. If you don't understand, write a question mark in the margin, then phrase a question on a separate sheet of paper. Ask these questions to your tutor either in a tutorial or informally.
6. Don't underline in introductions; the point(s) will almost certainly be made later, and might be clearer
7. Use brackets when several lines are important to underline, to avoid clutter.

When to Make Notes On a Separate Page

- When you need more detail than you can write in the margin of the text.
- When you are reading from a library book, borrowed book etc.
- When you need to look at several sources for one task (easier to organise)

What to write down?

- Write **key details** first to make sure your notes can be filed easily; record the topic/module name and/or number, lecturer's name, date/time etc.
- **Don't just copy** from the slides: think about what is being said, and what **the important issues** are.
- Re-write key points in your own words (**summarise**)
- If there's something you don't understand, write down **questions** to revisit later

Exercise 2

1. Look at the notes you have taken so far during this lecture. Ask yourself the following questions:
 - Have I identified and highlighted key points?
 - Have I summarised in my own words, or copied from the slides?
 - Have I noted questions when I haven't understood?
2. After you have looked at your own notes, discuss these questions in small groups.

The Cornell Method - 1

Divide your page into three sections with the following headers and content:

Cue Column

Divide your notes into sections using the cue column; these headers can be based on chapter or section headers in your source

Notes Column

- (a) Record the key points from the lecture or the source
- (b) As soon as possible after listening/reading, ask yourself if you understand all of your notes; if not, write questions and seek the answers from other sources or your peers/tutor

Summary

Write a summary of the most important points, as succinctly as possible.

The Cornell Method - 2

- When you want to find something in your notes – use the cue column
- When you want to recall or revise something in your notes – use the summary box

Exercise 3

- Draw a Cornell system grid and use it to take notes for the rest of this lecture.
- At the end of the lecture, you will be asked to review and compare your grid with others in the class

Reading - 1

- Styles of reading vary depending on what you are reading and why you are reading it.
- Think of these examples:
 - Reading a textbook chapter before a lecture
 - Reading a journal article to reference in an essay
 - Reading a newspaper on the way to work
 - Reading a novel in the evening

Reading - 2

“Academic” reading usually falls into two categories:

- ***Speed Reading*** – extracting the key points of information from a source as quickly as possible.
- ***Detail Reading*** – developing detailed notes on, and understanding of, a key source.

Speed Reading

To quickly get the main ideas of a text:

1. Read the headings and subheadings
2. Read the introduction
3. Read the conclusion
4. Now if anything isn't clear, go directly to that (sub-) section and skim through until you understand the point being made.

Detail Reading: The SQ3R Method

- Used for assembling, recording, organising and internalising information
 - **S**urvey
 - **Q**uestion
 - **R**ead
 - **R**ecite
 - **R**eview

S – Survey

1. Get an overview of the whole text before you begin, much as we did when speed reading. Look at:
 - Headings, subheadings, titles and chapters
 - Abstracts, introductions and conclusions
 - Any pictures, figures, diagrams, charts or graphs.
2. Now make a note of the overall structure and organisation of the text.
 - If using Cornell notes, this will be your Cue Column

Q - Question

- Identify your reasons for reading this source. Ask yourself:
 - What do I already know about this subject?
 - What do I need/want to know about this subject?
 - Does this source support/contradict what I know from elsewhere?
 - Am I reading this in preparation for a lecture or seminar?
 - Am I reading this in preparation for an assignment or exam?

R1 - Read

1. Read a section moderately quickly at first.
2. Make notes on the section.
3. If there are gaps in your notes or you are not clear about what has been said, go back and re-read all or part of it more slowly and carefully.

R2 - Recite

- Can I recall the key points without going back to the text?
 1. Summarise your notes – write the key points in your own words.
 2. Test yourself – see if you can write (or say out loud) the key points without looking at your notes.

R3 - Review

- Always come back to notes on your key texts later on, and test whether you have internalised the key points.
- This may be a day later, or a week, or longer. You may return to a key source several times during a module.

Listening - 1

- Extracting information from speech is in many ways the most difficult.
- This is because it happens in real time – if a lecturer says something and you miss it, you can't stop the lecture and ask to hear it again! Nor can you “re-wind” to check something you missed

Listening - 2

- In the seminar, we will practice some Active Listening activities to help focus on what is being said and extract the important points.
- For now, though, the following is enough to begin with...

Key Listening Tips

- Don't try to write everything down.
- Write down **headings first** and **details later**.
- If you don't have handouts, don't copy down what's written on the slides. Write down what the presenter says first – if you don't have time to write down the points on the slides, you can always ask for a copy later.
- Don't panic! If you miss something, keep focussing on the next point – you can always 'fill in the gaps' by talking to friends or tutors later, or reading up in supporting textbooks

Exercise 3 Revisited

- In Exercise 3, you were asked to draw a Cornell grid and use it to take notes for the remainder of this lecture.
- Take a moment to look back over your notes now. If you haven't done so already, complete your cue column and summary box for each page.
- Now compare with your other students. How are your grids similar and how are they different? How can you improve on yours in future?

Exercise 1 Revisited

- In Exercise 1, you were asked to write down your note-taking objectives for this lecture.
- Now look back at your notes. Have they fulfilled your objectives? To what extent do you think they have met the objectives which you set?
- Discuss your experiences with others, then feed back to the class.

References and Further Reading

- Race, P. (2003). *How to Study*. Oxford, Blackwell Publishing
 - See Part III, pp73-9 in particular
- Pauk, W. and Owens, R. (2010). *How to Study in College*. 10th edition. Belmont CA, Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- University of Manchester online study skills resource:
http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/studyskills/essentials/reading/study_reading.html

Topic 2

Any Questions?



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