

Taking effective notes

Improving your note taking is a quick and simple way of becoming more efficient at work. Learning improved note taking means learning to listen better. You'll be able to reduce the time and effort needed to reconstruct the information you have received. All you need to do is master a few simple techniques.



Optimizing your note taking

Gear your note taking to your objective

Before taking any notes, ask yourself, "What is my objective?" You can then separate the essential information from the superficial.

There are innumerable possible objectives for note taking. You may want to organize your ideas, extract the essentials, memorize information better, or even avoid having to memorize things.

No note taking method is in itself better or more useful than any other. It must simply be geared to its objective.

- If you are taking notes to describe something, a few carefully chosen expressions or words will often suffice.
- If your aim is to assimilate new data or organize complex information, see which parameters need to be taken into account and quantify their importance. Divide the information into different themes, and list the pros and cons.
- If you wish to remember principles, definitions, rules or quotations, each and every word is important so note down key phrases or whole sentences.

Time-saving techniques

- Filter information, leaving aside anything that isn't essential to meaning.

Speeches generally contain numerous words and phrases, such as polite forms of address and paraphrases, that don't provide actual information. If you make a note of all these things, you risk wasting time and not having enough time left to note down the information that really matters.

- Rephrase.

Note down meanings and not just words.

Unless you want to reuse a quote, don't note it down word for word. Use your own words. By rewording a quote, you'll be expressing in simple language what you have understood it to mean. This is the best way to avoid being passive and mechanical and producing notes that are wordy, pompous, and unusable.

- Use abbreviations in the following cases:
 - for everyday words and expressions
that → t / for example → f. ex / which is to say → i.e.
 - for words that are very common in your professional jargon
Trademark → TM / copyright → ©...
 - for words with common endings
Optimization → optimizat° or optimizatn...

There is no fixed rule; the important thing is that you understand yourself.

- Use punctuation marks and symbols.

Use symbols whenever possible. Symbols like → and < > can easily replace three or four words.
Here again, there is no fixed rule.