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HOW TO START NOTE- TAKING

Unleash Your
Creativity



FROM ZERO TO ONE



A Handbook that Avoids
Being A Handbook



The State of Note-Taking Tutorials

I was blessed for much of my education to not need to study. I was able to perform well by just listening during class. The only form of studying I did involved me talking to my peers about the subject material and thinking about it. This was excellent for classes that I cared about, but I underperformed in those subject that were disinteresting or when the teacher was boring. I could expect a B so long as a class wasn't homework heavy. I received a head injury in January of 2020 which hindered my ability recall significant portions of new information. I noticed this decline around September of that year and realized that my note-taking system was no-longer sufficient. I contacted a few resources but realized that my University offered very little that would actually help. I decided to learn how to take notes as a 21-year-old.

I watched hundreds of hours of content related to note-taking and tried more methods than I can remember. Each of these attempts began with a rush of energy and an idea of what direction to go, and ended with me forgetting about it or being burnt out. I realized that what burned me out of most systems was a need to spend a large portion of time preparing notes before writing them. I attempted to create my own system many times and I continued to fail to make something that felt right and was useful. I had hundreds of pages of various notes from my past and I realized that what I had been doing up to then was trying to categorize my previous notes. I was spending more time thinking of how to format my notes than thinking about my notes. I recalled that thinking about a subject is what helped me perform well in said subject and I realized that nearly all of the information I found online was putting my mind in a position where I was thinking more about note-taking-theory than taking notes.

So I did something unreasonable. I just started taking notes in the way that felt right. I started by writing what I will now call 'Journals' but at the time, it was just writing in the way that felt most comfortable. I had no goal in my notes other than to create them and later analyze them. I chose to study by breaking down my notes in ways that my gut told me to try. I did not create any rules, I simply looked at my notes and played around with them. This is the moment I realized the error, or oversight, that plagues content related to learning how to take notes; they do not teach it from scratch. Videos on note-taking tend to be from experts in memory, or people who are successful. Most of these people learned how to take note when they were young enough that they simply cannot remember starting from scratch. They all use conglomerate words which, if you do not define in the exact same way, would lead you to never actually understand them. Rather than trying to correct all of the ills of this field, I hope to create a handbook which actually helps.



How to Start Note-Taking

It is Simple, Don't Let Others Complicate It

To begin note-taking for the first time you must do two things. You must take notes and you must refine your notes. How you take your notes matters VERY little, so long as there are enough words to work with. Refining your notes can take any form, even increasing their length or splitting a note into multiple notes. The way this is done also matters little. It is through refining your notes that you get better at taking your notes. You cannot become a better note-taker by taking notes, you get better by refining your mind. When you keep your mind in the state of refinement, you start refining your notes as you write them, because your mind is thinking in a refined version of your language. But, notes are never fully refined. Reviewing notes often keeps notes updated.

What Comes Next?

I am aware that I am imperfect. Although the directions for how to begin taking notes seems clear to me, I am confident that it will not make sense to everyone. The remainder of this handbook is meant to provide real-world examples of what the refinement process looks like. Refinement is the key to note-taking, but it is useless unless the key is in your hand. This handbook should plant the seeds of note-taking that you may reap them.

What Notes Are Of

If you have taken notes before or you spend some time thinking of what your notes may be of, you'll likely find that your notes are "What is...", "How to...", "What did...", or some personal variation of these questions. Unluckily, the most helpful format of taking notes tends to vary by which of these your questions your note answers, but you luckily have the power to find out which works best for you. Here are some things I have learned from taking notes of these types.

Taking Notes for Skills

Skills are things like "How to..." These are those things which are completed. Note-taking is a skill, jump starting a car is a skill, cooking is a skill. I am very apt to skip a step that seems obvious to me and as such, I have learned that documenting each step in detail, along with providing a simple list, is ideal.

Taking Notes for Theories and Jargon

Theories and Jargon are often the same thing except that Jargon is more likely to simply be a new word which references something grander while a theory is often a very drawn out argument. These are "What is..." I have found that referencing what I read to come to my explanation is ideal, especially when it comes to theories. I encountered many summations of theories while studying philosophy and I often found these summations to be awful in their interpretation of another's belief. Knowing who I am summarizing is ideal for greater accuracy later.

Taking Notes for Events

These are the "What did..." notes. Journals are the primary example of what these notes tend to look like. Complicated events, especially ones I can research, are best when structured more like a text book.

INSTRUCTIONS

Practice Your Skills

I want you to summarize this document for this next section, then consider what you are taking notes for and write a personal plan for your note-taking.

| Summary |
|---------------------------|
| Write your answer here... |

Personal Plan



Why Are You Taking Notes?

Write your answer here...

What Would It Look Like to Fail in Taking Your Notes?

Write your answer here...

Conclusion

The length of this document has been kept short as length is the enemy of attention and I would give up on reading a document of this sort if it were much longer. Please take the information provided here and begin taking and editing your notes. Please send any feedback you have to BrandonScottDye@gmail.com and check out my website (<https://theminaciousmonarch.github.io/>) for more examples of note-taking.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Brandon Scott Dye". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The word "Brandon" is on the left, followed by "Scott" in the middle, and "Dye" on the right. The letters are connected, with a large, stylized 'S' for "Scott" and a large, stylized 'D' for "Dye".