

Progressive Summarization Cheat Sheet

A Technique for Creating Retrievable Notes by Tiago Forte

Imagine if you could take notes not just for a single class or book, but **for a life-time of learning**. Imagine if every interesting idea or useful fact you've ever encountered was accessible any time you needed it.

And finally, imagine if you could accomplish this in the course of the reading you're *already* doing anyway, with minimal extra time and effort required.

Welcome to Progressive Summarization, a practical technique for creating notes that are easy to find when you need them most. It is part of my course and methodology **Building a Second Brain**, in which I've taught thousands of high performers how to **leverage the full power of their ideas and amplify their creative output**.

[Click here for a free introduction](#) to the technique, including guidelines for what to save, how to decide what to highlight, and other ways of distilling notes down to their essential points.

Progressive summarization relies on a simple practice that everyone knows how to do – highlighting – but turns it into a powerful tool for creating knowledge assets for the long term.

On the next page, you'll see a succinct summary of the five “layers” that can be used to summarize any book, article, video, lecture, or other piece of content in a way that surfaces the key points for the future.

Here are a few **key guidelines to keep in mind**:

- **Don't apply all the layers to all notes** – the more valuable a note is, the more layers it should have
- Highlight passages based on **what resonates with you**, without trying too hard to understand why
- **Spend more time on the sources that interest you**, instead of sticking to a rigid workflow
- **Minimize how much you highlight** at every layer, so that you can get the gist of a note at a glance

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Layer 5: Remix into new works

Layer 4: Summarize in your words

Layer 3: Highlight best points

Layer 2: Bold key points

Layer 1: Save most interesting excerpts

