

ANT: Automatic note taking

Overview

- You can use automatic note taking as a means of unblocking and speeding your way through the literature review.
- By making quick notes of your texts you can train yourself to read effectively and to focus on identifying the core of a paper rather than painstakingly reading every part of the contents.
- For less experienced writers/researchers, this approach may be most useful after they have tuned their focus by some close reading of key texts in the area.
- Experienced writers/researchers may be able to move directly to the automatic note taking stage.

“Compose the page as though talking aloud, as though describing exactly what aspects of the source you can use in your planned project”.

Boice Professors as writers p107 (Kindle location 1729 chapter 7)

The rationale behind recommending automatic note taking, is that since it is a relatively informal process, it removes some of the reservations you may have in recording your first through response. If you want to create a more formal annotation, you can do that later, after you have reflected on the paper, and perhaps compared it with others in the field.

The automated note taking process - an overview

Train yourself to follow the protocol for automated note taking whenever you read an academic paper. You can use it systematically as you establish a preliminary understanding of an area¹, for the papers which you may want to cite as you prepare your preliminary research, when preparing a background section of a paper, creating an extended abstract, and during the preliminary stage of a systematic review.

Automated note taking is a preliminary to preparing a detailed note on a publication such as you would prepare for an annotated bibliography or thorough-going literature review.

The Process overview step by step:

- i. Identify papers
- ii. Read the abstract
- iii. Decide: progress or ignore
- iv. If progress
 - I. Read the abstract, introduction, conclusion
 - II. Skim through the contents
 - III. Make the note* (see below)
 - IV. Optional but recommended
Add your not to the reference entry in your citation manager
(e.g. Mendeley, Zotero, Endnote)

Walkthrough: How to make the note for automatic note taking

Write down a heading with the reference written *in full in Harvard format*

Create your notes (informal/conversational)

- What is the paper about?
- What sort of paper is it?
- What are the papers strong points?
- What are its weak points ?
- Record any further references cited that you want to follow up

In your notes you can include personal observations e.g

- I found this hard to read but interesting;
- The diagrams were particularly helpful;
- It's a good example of how a study is conducted;
- I thought the statistical method was particularly interesting

Possible Tools (automated note taking)

It will probably be faster to write your notes by hand than by typing - evidence suggest that they are also more likely to be retained by your memory in this way.

You could use (large) old fashioned index cards to keep your notes (handy because they can then be sorted by paper type and by author)

You can always scan them to pdf if you want to create an archive or handle them electronically.

If you want to use technology, by all means create some sort of text file with all your notes in alphabetic order by author, or use something like Evernote or even put them directly into a reference manager like Mendely which enables you to have a personal note entry

Reference

Boice, R., 1990. Professors as Writers, New Forum Press

¹This method is particularly relevant for the initial 'orientation' read of a paper. See the OU flowchart version of Keshav's how to read a paper http://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/pluginfile.php/420119/mod_resource/content/3/Keshav-%20How%20to%20read%20a%20paper%20workflow.pdf