Course: Research Methodology   Level: L2
Lecture: 5   Academic year: 2022/2023
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Literature Review

NOTE-TAKING

Note taking constitutes of making records from written reports, lectures, conferences, interviews and so on. Reasons for taking notes include:

• *To help you remember something* You can't hope to retain a whole lecture, book or discussion permanently in your memory, so instead you make notes of the most important items and use the notes for revision and reference.

• *To keep a permanent record of something* If you attend a lecture or visit somewhere as part of your course, your notes may be your own record of what took place.

• *To help in your planning* Notes can be a good way of starting off a project or a piece of writing; you can note down the main things you need to do, the books you need to read, and so on.

• *To reorder material* Making notes, which can be reshuffled, provides one of the most useful opportunities for rearranging material in whichever form is most convenient to you.

• *To help you understand what you are learning* Writing things down yourself forces you to think them through properly and is one of the best ways of remembering them.

• *To help you to concentrate* If you are listening to someone talking, your mind may easily wander; making notes helps to keep you active and involved.

1. What to note down?

When making notes, you will have to make judgements all the time about what information will, or might, be of use to you. These judgements will depend on your own knowledge of your subject, the nature of your research problem and the objective of your reading. You may want to copy facts from references, such as dates, places, names, statistics, formulas and definitions; or summarize arguments, questions, explanations, illustrations or descriptions. In addition, you may find it useful to write comments about your reactions to the reference materials and state relationships, conclusions or interpretations that come to mind during the contemplative phases of your work. You may also want jot down items that require further checking.

2. Note-taking Language

It is generally agreed that, except for quotations, when you take notes you should use your own active vocabulary and not the author's. It is important to use your active vocabulary in note-taking, because it helps to ensure that you have a reasonably full grasp of the meaning of the information concerned; it might assist in laying down a better memory trace in the brain; and finally, when you come to reread and synthesize the notes, your personal active vocabulary is more easily comprehensible and recognizable.

3. What to do with notes?

When writing a report you may want to draw upon your notes for a variety of reasons, for example, to support a particular position or to illustrate a point of view. You may want to make comparisons, weave a web of logical evidence, or support arguments by passages from recognized authorities. A body of notes, collected with discrimination, could provide the building blocks for all of these, assuming that the range of your notes is sufficiently wide. However, a haphazard collection of notes will leave you with an impoverished resource, and may cause your investigation to collapse.

4. Note-taking techniques

Smith and Smith (1994, pp. 93–103) put forward what they call 'golden rules' to help you take successful notes. These golden rules include:
1 Clarify your purpose.
2 Write all your notes on the same sized paper or cards.
3 When you begin, set out your notes properly. In making a full bibliographic record of the source of the notes you are writing, include author (or speaker); date of publishing or of event (e.g. lecture, interview); title of book, article, conference, lecture etc.; where published or held; detailed page numbers referring to the individual points, opinions and data which are noted; and usefully, the library catalogue number or other information to enable you to locate the book, article etc. quickly at a later date.
4 Use the title of the chapter or lecture to help you anticipate the main ideas of the text.
5 Keep your own ideas, comments and criticisms separate from those in the text.
6 When you finish, sum up what you have written.

Do not forget that you take notes to help in your writing at a later stage of your research project. To assist this, your notes should be brief and clear; if they are too long, you will find it tedious to go through them, either to search for a specific point, or to refresh your memory. For the same reason they should be easy to read and understand; if you cannot read through them to refresh your memory, they will fail in their purpose.

5. Collecting and ordering your notes

You will need to think of the manner in which you want to order to accumulate your notes. Many different formats are suggested, but you can design your own setup which might be more suitable for you than another. However, the most important feature is that each card, piece of paper or other form of record must include only *one* idea or *one* fact or *one* item or *one* question. That i because at this stage you do not yet know in which part of the structure of your research project this *one* piece of information will fit, or if it will be used at all. An effective note-taking system preserves the most significant ideas in a form that facilitates shifting, comparing, grouping and ordering items.
Finally, do not forget that *you* should decide which form of note-taking you should adopt and which suits your research project best. Notes are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. No matter how they are recorded and stored, the essential thing is that they are useful and contain the necessary information, and can be traced when required.

Task 9: Use the following note card to record information from the journal article you used in Task 8.

Mention what type of information you have included (statistics, formulas and definitions; or summarize arguments, questions, explanations, illustrations or descriptions)

Keyword
The note
The source