

# 1 Reading and noting

A note to readers. It is suggested that you increase magnification to 125% or 150% to read the guide on screen. Click on the magnifying glass icon at bottom left of the screen and select your magnification.

## ——— Key points in Chapter 1 ———

- **Decide what you need to read and read selectively.**
- **See texts as sources from which to extract information and analysis.**
- **Read intelligently by use of the SQ3R procedure.**
- **Remember the purpose for notes. Pitch the content and layout with that in mind.**

**R**EADING AND NOTING are central to advanced History study. Talks, lectures, films, videos, CD-Roms or discussions are complementary to reading and noting and can help understanding but reading and noting are the core activities for the History student.

### **Review of your reading style**

The trouble with reading and noting is that you have done this for years and have an established procedure. Do you need to change your approach and methods for advanced History study? We do not expect netball or football players to play the way they did in the primary school playground, or senior school team, when they reach the premier league: we take it for granted that they will develop their skills. The same is true for reading and noting. Because reading and noting are so central to History students' work, a review of your methods is important.

### **Selecting what to read**

The books you use contain information and ideas: they present an account of the past and analysis in which the connections between events are brought out, sometimes in the form of an argument. The

good student will see books as sources from which information, ideas and analysis can be gained efficiently – if an *active* approach is followed. The key is to be clear what you want from a book before you reach the stage of reading and noting. Recognition of the form and structure of a book will enable you to take a short cut to the central ideas. A book's main themes may be mentioned in the publisher's comment on the back cover. The argument may be summarised in an introduction or conclusion - and steps in the argument summarised at the end or beginning of each chapter. A book's main themes may be mentioned in the publisher's comment on the back cover. The contents page may indicate the themes and analysis as well as the structure of the book. Within a chapter subheadings may show the arrangement of the chapter contents and may indicate the development of an argument. Probably, most students will be used to selecting some chapters to read from a heavyweight textbook but the same selection should be applied to shorter, more specialised books. Even if you decide you need to follow the chapter in detail, do you need to read the whole chapter for you to extract the theme and key evidence? And, don't forget that for particular information the index is invaluable. You have made a big step towards increased study effectiveness if you think about books as carriers of information and ideas: aim to 'duck and weave' in order to take what you want, and not treat it as a sort of holy text which you have to study thoroughly from beginning to end. By *assessing and selecting* with your positive, not passive, approach you have taken control of the study task. After assessment, if you do decide you need to read and note most of a chapter the following is an effective method.

### **Extracting ideas and information from a chapter**

The worst way you can approach a chapter of, say, 15 pages is to start to read and note from the first page and plod through to the finish. In a manner similar to your response to the book as a whole, first survey the chapter. Flick through the pages and paragraphs to see the sequence of subjects and the analysis or argument. These may be indicated in the first, or sometimes the last, sentence of the paragraph. As you skim through, your eye will catch sight of evidence - events and dates. If you're an average student, and most students are, and careful with your reading, you will normally read slowly. To skim a chapter you will need to force your eyes to read in a different way, almost a casual way. You may not be good at this at first but the more you try and practise the more expert you will become. Just as we walk in different ways, we stroll, amble down a high street, go for a hike for sev-

eral hours or rush to catch a bus, and yet we walk in every instance, so the effective student will have different styles of reading and choose an appropriate style for a particular task. The one style, one speed, reader undertakes study with a major handicap.

### **SQ3R – a sequence formula for effective reading**

You have now *surveyed* the chapter and completed the first stage of the classic formula for reading and noting, SQ3R. The second part, Q for *question*, reminds you to prepare your mind to be active: in this you should question what your skim reading has suggested the pages present and what *you* want from them. It is helpful, also, to notice and question the writer's interpretation and argument. You decide what is needed for *your* purpose. Just because the writer covers certain topics it does not mean that you have to read and note them. Only do so if it serves your study purpose. Next, the 3 Rs. They represent *Read, Recall* and *Report*. This is the stage for more careful reading, remembering (recalling) what you read followed by a report, that is the notes of what you decide to write (as far as possible from memory). Always try to use *your own words* when you write notes. If you are new to this effective procedure it is best to be realistic: you will not read, recall and report more than two or three pages at a time until you become more skilled. When you first try higher-skill reading you will not be very quick but your speed will increase as you practise. The SQ3R procedure may seem complicated when detailed, as here, but with practise it will become second nature to you and students who gain most from their study time and effort use it.

### **Reasons for notemaking and the depth of notes**

Noting is arguably one of the most tedious aspects of study. So why make notes? There are two main reasons. First, to help you understand a passage from a history book, its contents, structure and argument and, second, to provide a permanent record of the book's information and ideas - a record that can be used for essays and for exams in months' or years' time. Both the first and second reasons mean the layout of your notes is very important. There are a few guidelines that, if you follow them, will greatly increase the value of your notes.

Before these are outlined there is an important question to consider. How detailed a record of your reading should your notes be? The answer is not straightforward because the detail will depend on the purpose of your reading. If you read to gain the main argument or themes from a chapter, your notes will be only your summary of the argument or themes. If, on the other hand, you are reading the chapter



of a textbook in order to gain a thorough outline of a topic which you have not previously studied, you will want to make more comprehensive notes.

Whichever type of notemaking you choose, you need to choose the appropriate depth and thoroughness. There are two errors to avoid: notes which are too skimpy and notes which are too detailed and too thorough. The first impedes revision and learning, the second requires too much effort and might obstruct your grasp of the topic as a whole and also slow your information search. The best notes are those which are just on the edge of being too thin and too short. If they fall below the level of being clear, because they are too short, all is not lost - see the final point of the next section on layout.

### **The layout of your notes**

The two reasons for notes are to help your understanding and to provide a record to enable you to revise and learn the topic. These two reasons are a guide to the layout of notes. Notes are more helpful when not written like a book, with paragraphs made up of sentences. They should be items of information or ideas or steps in an argument or analysis. When you come to revise or learn your topic you should not need to study the pages to sort out information. Good notes can be learned by rapid scanning, little more than being looked at. To make this rapid assimilation possible the layout is very important.

### **Here are a few features good note layout will have:**

- Headings and subheadings, which are presented in such a way that the reader's eye is drawn to them because they are written in larger letters or underlined or highlighted in some way.
- There is no need to write in complete sentences. Notes are not the place to improve your expression and grammar.
- Use contractions for frequently used words to save time and effort. Work out contractions that are useful to you. Your notes are only for you: they don't need to be understood by other people. A few contractions which are commonly used include: The first letter of the name often written (G for Gladstone); v instead of against; an arrow to show 'leads to', and so on.
- While it is important to have a meaningful layout, your handwriting needs only to be legible for you. Don't waste time with immaculate handwriting.
- Space out your notes. White space on a page is a quick indicator of note quality: leave a lot of it. If you are successful with good layout this will happen anyway. There is no need to worry about



the paper cost of spaced-out notes: the additional cost of paper is minimal, equivalent to one drink in your favorite bar a term.

- Well laid out notes have graded indentation (the position of the start of words from the left margin) to present the structure and indicate the importance and relationship of information.

### The Church in 1529

Emergence of a Nation State by AGK Smith pp 13 - 17 (1984)

#### p13 Four features of the Church in 1529

- wealth
- unpopularity (anticlericalism) with laymen
- challenge from reform movements outside the (Roman) Church
  - hollards
  - lutherans
- the Church's dependence, in England, on the Crown

#### WEALTH

Its lands worth about £370,000 pa (rents)

- about half went to monasteries
- about half to secular clergy (in parishes)  
i.e. about 20% of England's land owned by the church

Signs of its wealth, its buildings: cathedrals, churches and monasteries gold and silver plate, artistic treasures

#### ANTICLERICALISM

Why?

1. wealth, made worse by Wolsey's lifestyle and love of splendour
2. standards of the clergy: they were as good as before BUT expectations were higher
3. irritations, especially ecclesiastical courts  
pluralism  
tithes

The Hunne case, 1511-14 showed these irritations.

Hunne case led to dispute in Parliament over benefit of clergy

This anticlericalism still evident in the early sessions of the Reformation Parliament.  
AGKS calls this type of anticlericalism 'negative anticlericalism.'

p14

The layout of your notes: imposing structure by indentation, spacing and subheadings. Notice the page references from the text added on the left.

- Impose structure on your notes so that importance is shown and supporting information is clearly indicated.
- All notes should be headed by the full title of the book from which they are made, the author, date of publication and, if the book is from a library, the class mark. Farther down the page, in the left-hand margin, add the page number of the book every now and again. This good practice takes no time to do but it can save you hours if your notes are not overfull and you need to check something at the time of revision.

### **Notes from talks and lectures**

Styles of talks differ so widely that suggestions on making notes is difficult. Nevertheless, a few general comments can be made. Two main reasons for making notes from talks to help your concentration and to summarise the themes or arguments. There are two types of notes that are unhelpful. First, notes where the student has attempted to record everything (the notes are too full, the arguments, analysis, themes tend to be lost in the bulk of writing) and second, notes which contain too little. It is, therefore, a matter of judgement and balance. You are unlikely to be drawn to write too much if you have completed some overview reading of the topic and so you are free to pick the main points, the structure of argument or analysis, and the telling evidence from the talk. Notes are best presented on the page with a spaced out layout and with a structure in the way you make good notes from books.

Once made, it is good practice to spend 10 minutes, within the following three days, reading over your talk notes. Time spent then, when you can still remember some of what was said and are able to amend your notes, can save an hour of puzzlement at the end of the year.