

Shortcuts for Fast Notetaking

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Introduction

How often do you skim-read non-fiction books?

Do you page through quickly, looking for useful nuggets, but without really learning anything, without experiencing any “aha” moments?

It can happen too often. The bottom line is that if you’re only skimming and not truly absorbing, not taking action, that will never help you. Which is kind of missing the point of a “self-help” book!

It’s therefore a great idea to have a notebook at your side to write down your notes, thoughts, and ideas. (Or the book may have a companion workbook you can use.) If you’re not great at writing, like a dyslexic person on our team, use a voice memo app on your phone.

In the digital age, manually taking notes might seem old-fashioned, but I assure you that a kind-of-magic happens when you express your own interpretation of something. You achieve that when you write your thoughts on paper or say them out loud.

We recommend you take all sorts of notes:

- Before you start, think about what you would like to find out from the book and what you’d like to change. Write that down or speak it into your voice memo app.
- This one’s really important: Think about why you want to learn or change those things you notes; why you picked up this book. Write down or record that too.
- As you read, write or record a note when something strikes you as important, you’d like to know more, you have a question, or you’d like to try out a technique as soon as possible.

The Value of Manual Note-Taking

Here's why it's beneficial:

Encoding Effect: Writing down key points in your own words helps you synthesize and process the information, making it easier to remember. This deeper processing of information, known as the 'encoding effect', also helps commit details to memory more effectively than reading without taking notes.

Better Retention: Writing by hand slows you down a little (especially compared to typing your notes), helping you to increase your attention, and absorb and understand the information. You've also got notes to look at later on,

Clarifying Points: If something doesn't make sense right away, you can make a note to check it out later.

Avoid the Pitfalls of Typing: Typing notes may seem more efficient than handwriting them but leads to superficial understanding, as it focuses more on capturing all the details than identifying key points and processing information. Handwritten notes encourage deeper understanding.

Consider developing your own shorthand method for quicker note-taking. One of my teachers taught my class how to do this in our first year of high school, and I've added to it over time. I use abbreviations and symbols to capture key points efficiently. This method allows me to take notes quickly without missing essential details. This handout provides a framework for you to start with.

Shortcuts for Fast Note-taking

Shortcuts make it easier and faster to take handwritten notes.

This tip sheet contains examples of how I shorten common words and use replacement symbols. I based this over the years on a mix of things including Greek letters, math symbols, and common abbreviations in recipes and knitting patterns! Build on this list to create your own.

General Tip 1: Remove all (or most) vowels, e.g.

background	bkgd
between	btwn
building	bldg
helpful	hlpfl
important	impt
learning	lrng
maintain	mntn
meaning	mng
tablespoon	tbsp
teaspoon	tsp
ultimately	ult
unabridged	unabrgd

General Tip 2: For words ending in “tion” – use the root (beginning) of the word with ‘n’ at the end. Sometimes you can use just the first syllable with ‘n’, like the two examples in italics.

circulation	circulat’n
education	educat’n
inflation	inflat’n
protection	protect’n
representation	represent’n
<i>selection</i>	sel’n
<i>situation</i>	sit’n

You can use a similar approach with words that have other endings, e.g. for words that end with “ing” – use the root of the word with ‘g’ at the end.

alternate	alt
and	+ or &
approximately	~
backward, going backward	←
because	∴ or bc
between	bt
bigger	^
business	biz
change	Δ
characters, characterized	chars, char'd
circular, round	○
compare	cf, cmp
could	cd
decrease, reduce, down, downward	↓
different	difft
difficult	diffc
equals	=
especially	esp
experience, experienced	exp, exp'd
extra, lots	++
forward, progressing	→
happy	😊
important	impt
increase, grow, gain, up, upward	↑
infinite	∞
less than	<
maximum	max
minimum	min
money	\$
more than	>
near	nr
number	# or no.

opportunity	opp
organize, organized, organization	org, org'd, org'n
reference	ref
regular	reg
responsible, responsive	resp
resulting in	=>
someone	s.o.
something	s.th
standard	std
therefore	∴
though	tho
through	thru
together	tog
unhappy	☹
with	w/
without	w/o
would	wd
year, years (or yours / yourself)	yr, yrs
yesterday	y'day
your	yr
yourself	ys

I always leave a small margin on the left-hand side of my notes. That way I can add symbols, like the ones below, to highlight certain points. This ensures that important notes and action items stand out when I review my notes later.

Important information	*
Very important information	**
Noteworthy or surprising	!!
Unsure/question/check this	?
Action to follow up	→ or ① ② ③ etc. if several actions

We hope this freebie has given you some ideas
for a way to handwrite notes faster than usual.
Happy note-taking!

Questions or want to learn more? - contact us at
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