**2018/19**

**Note-taking**

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**preparation for higher education**

**academic skills**

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**1. What kind of learner are you?**

Take the VAK learning styles self-assessment questionnaire (SQA: Online, Accessed 9 July 2018)[[1]](#footnote-1) to find out.

………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..**Circle the answer that most represents how you generally behave.**

1. When I operate new equipment I generally:
   1. read the instructions first
   2. listen to an explanation from someone who has used it before
   3. go ahead and have a go, I can figure it out as I use it
2. When I need directions for traveling I usually:
   1. look at a map
   2. ask for spoken directions
   3. follow my nose and maybe use a compass
3. When I cook a new dish, I like to:
   1. follow a written recipe
   2. call a friend for an explanation
   3. follow my instincts, testing as I cook
4. If I am teaching someone something new, I tend to:
   1. write instructions down for them
   2. give a verbal explanation
   3. demonstrate first and then let them have a go
5. I tend to say:
   1. watch how I do it
   2. listen to me explain
   3. you have a go
6. During my free time I most enjoy:
   1. going to museums and galleries
   2. listening to music and talking to my friends
   3. playing sport or doing DIY
7. When I go shopping for clothes, I tend to:
   1. imagine what they would look like on
   2. discuss them with the shop staff
   3. try them on and test them out
8. When I am choosing a holiday I usually:
   1. read lots of brochures
   2. listen to recommendations from friends
   3. imagine what it would be like to be there
9. If I was buying a new car, I would:
   1. read reviews in newspapers and magazines
   2. discuss what I need with my friends
   3. test-drive lots of different types
10. When I am learning a new skill, I am most comfortable:
    1. watching what the teacher is doing
    2. talking through with the teacher exactly what I am supposed to do
    3. give it a try myself and work it out as I go
11. If I am choosing food off a menu, I tend to:
    1. imagine what the food will look like
    2. talk through the options in my head or with my partner
    3. imagine what the food will taste like
12. When I listen to a band, I can’t help:
    1. watching the band members and other people in the audience
    2. listening to the lyrics and the beats
    3. moving in time with the music
13. When I concentrate, I most often:
    1. focus on the words or pictures in front of me
    2. discuss the problem and the possible solutions in my head
    3. move around a lot, fiddle with pens and pencils and touch things
14. I choose household furnishing because I like:
    1. their colours and how they look
    2. the descriptions the sales-people give me
    3. the textures and what it feels like to touch them
15. My first memory is of:
    1. looking at something
    2. being spoken to
    3. doing something
16. When I am anxious, I:
    1. visualise the worst-case scenarios
    2. talk over in my head what worries me most
    3. can’t sit still, fiddle and move around constantly
17. I feel especially connected to other people because of:
    1. how they look
    2. what they say to me
    3. how they make me feel
18. When I have to revise for an exam, I generally:
    1. write lots of revision notes and diagrams
    2. talk over my notes, alone or with other people
    3. imagine making the movement or creating the formula
19. If I am explaining to someone I tend to:
    1. show them what I mean
    2. explain to them in different ways until they understand
    3. encourage them to try and talk them through my ideas as they do it
20. I really love:
    1. watching films, photography, looking at art or people watching
    2. listening to music, the radio or talking to friends
    3. taking part in sporting activities, eating fine foods and wines and dancing
21. Most of my free time is spent:
    1. watching television
    2. talking to friends
    3. doing a physical activity or making things
22. When I first contact a new person, I usually:
    1. arrange a face to face meeting
    2. talk to them on the telephone
    3. try to get together while doing something else, such as an activity or a meal
23. I first notice how people:
    1. look and dress
    2. sound and speak
    3. stand and move
24. If I am angry, I tend to:
    1. keep replaying in my mind what it is that has upset me
    2. raise my voice and tell people how I feel
    3. stamp about, slam doors and physically demonstrate my anger
25. I find it easiest to remember:
    1. faces
    2. names
    3. things I have done
26. I think you can tell if someone is lying if:
    1. they avoid looking at you
    2. their voice changes
    3. they give me funny vibes
27. When I meet an old friend:
    1. I say “It’s great to see you!”
    2. I say “It’s great to hear from you!”
    3. I give them a hug or a handshake
28. I remember things best by:
    1. writing notes or keeping printed details
    2. saying them aloud or repeating words and key points in my head
    3. doing or practising the activity or imagining it being done
29. If I have to complain about faulty goods, I am most comfortable:
    1. writing a letter
    2. complaining over the phone
    3. taking them back to the store or posting them back to head office
30. I tend to say:
    1. I see what you mean
    2. I hear what you are saying
    3. I know how you feel

………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..Now add up how many As, Bs and Cs you selected.

As =

Bs =

Cs =

If you chose mostly As you have a **VISUAL** learning style

If you chose mostly Bs you have an **AUDITORY** learning style

If you chose mostly Cs you have a **KINAESTHETIC** learning style

Some people find that their learning style may be a blend of two or three styles, in this case read about the styles that apply to you in the explanation.

The VAK learning styles model suggests that most people can be divided into one of three preferred styles of learning. These three styles are as follows, (there is no right or wrong learning style)

* Someone with a **visual** learning style has a preference for seen or observed things, including pictures, diagrams, demonstrations, displays, handouts, films, flipchart, etc. These people will use phrases such as “show me”, “let’s have a look at that” and will be best able to perform a new task after reading the instructions or watching someone else do it first. These are the people who will work from lists and written directions and instructions.
* Someone with an **auditory** learning style has a preference for the transfer of information through listening: to the spoken word of self or others, of sounds and noises. These people will use phrases such as “tell me”, “let’s talk it over” and will be best able to perform a new task after listening to instructions from an expert. These are the people who are happy being given spoken instructions over the phone, and can remember all the words to songs they hear!
* Someone with a **kinaesthetic** learning style has a preference for physical experience – touching, feeling, holding, doing, practical hands-on experiences. These people will use phrases such as “Let me try”, “how do you feel?” and will be best able to perform a new task by going ahead and trying it out, learning as they go. These are the people who like to experiment, hands-on, and never look at the instructions first!

People commonly have a main preferred learning style, but this will be part of a blend of all three. Some people have a very strong preference; other people have a more even mixture of two, or less commonly, three styles. When you know your preferred learning style(s) you understand the type of learning that works best for you. There is no right or wrong learning style. The point is that there are types of learning that are right for your own preferred learning style (SQA: Online, Accessed 9 July 2018).

**2. Note-taking**

First and foremost, notes are a valuable resource. Their purpose is to help you remember key information relating to the subject you are studying. Good notes can help you get good grades. Without some note-taking strategies, it will be almost impossible for you to retain all the information you take in, especially during lectures.

Note-taking is an active learning skill; it develops your understanding of the subject you are studying; it reduces large quantities of information into more manageable sizes; and it helps you prepare for assignments and exams.

There are many note-taking methods, including:

* **Linear notes** (trying to write down as much of what is said or written as possible).
* **Keyword notes** (taking down the most important words said or written and adding a very brief comment, explanation or description).
* **Concept map notes** (linking concepts cited in a lecture or text in map form rather than a list).
* **Two column notes** (taking notes in one column and filling in the other with comments, questions and headings afterwards).
* **Cornell notes** (three sections, taking notes in right column, adding questions and cues in left and summaries in bottom – revise by covering right and answering left).

For more detailed explanations of these note-taking methods, use the links provided in the **Useful links** section of this unit.

The following sections focus on note-taking in practice, when reading, listening and attending lectures.

**3. Reading**

Being a successful student in higher education requires you to read regularly, thoroughly and efficiently. Taking notes as you read is essential in order to put the reading you do to effective use in your assignments and exams. Developing note-taking skills for reading will ensure you make the most of your time in the library.

**EXERCISE 1**

Read the passage below. Do not write anything and **read it only once**.

………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..**China**

As it has emerged on to the world stage there has been increasing interest in China and the Chinese. At the same time, China has become more accessible for visitors from abroad and is now a popular destination for European tourists and business people.

China is a country of approximately 1.4 billion people, which is about 19% of the total population of the world. The population density is approximately 390 people per square mile.

China is regarded as one of the oldest of all civilizations. It is believed that the Chinese invented paper-making, the compass, gunpowder and printing. Among its most important ancient projects are the Great Wall of China, the Grand Canal and the Karez irrigation system.

The ruling party of China is the Communist Party and the current President is Xi Jinping, who succeeded Hu Jintao in 2013.

The official language of China is Mandarin, which has two standardised forms: Putonghua in the mainland and Guoyu in Taiwan. China has had a written language for over 6000 years.

China is a multinational state containing 56 officially recognised nationalities (or ethnic minorities). 90% of the population is Han and the rest is made up of the 55 minorities, including Mongols, Tibetans, Uyghurs, Tatars, Russians and Kazaks.

China’s currency is the Renminbi, which is more popularly known as the Yuan. £1 is currently worth around 8.80 Yuan.

The Chinese celebrated New Year 2018 on 16 February; 2019 will be the Year of the Pig.

………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..Now, without looking back at the text, write down everything you can remember about it. Do it as quickly as you can. You can write in note form and the order is not important; it is the facts you want to remember.

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Now look back at the original text and compare what you have remembered.

How did you do?

If you managed to remember ten points or more, you have done exceptionally well. More likely, you will have remembered less than ten points, showing how important it is for most students in higher education to make notes as they go along.

**EXERCISE 2**

Read the original text about China again. This time, pick out five important points.

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| --- |
| 1 |
| 2 |
| 3 |
| 4 |
| 5 |

Notice that you were asked to pick out the important points. One of the skills of learning to study effectively is learning to separate the important from the unimportant. The passage contains a lot of information and what you select depends on the question you are asked. For example, if you were asked to provide information for travellers to China which four points would you pick out?

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| --- |
| 1 |
| 2 |
| 3 |
| 4 |

And if you were asked about Chinese national identity, which four points would you pick out?

|  |
| --- |
| 1 |
| 2 |
| 3 |
| 4 |

In each case, why did you select the information you selected? How did you decide what was important and what was unimportant?

**4. Listening**

As a student in higher education you will spend a significant amount of time listening, especially at university. Lectures are a core component of all degree courses in nursing, as are seminars, workshops, small group tutorials, presentations, group and pair work, all of which require note-taking to remember the most important information. You may only hear this information once, so you need to have the skills to take good notes quickly.

**EXERCISE 3**

This exercise should be done **in pairs**.

In the appendices you will find the text of a debate entitled “Should celebrities promote charities?”. One of you should select the “Yes” side of the argument and the other the “No” side. Read the texts to each other in order (i.e. Yes Part 1, No Part 1, yes part 2, No Part 2 etc.) and take notes at the same time.

**Notes**

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Look at your notes and compare them with the original text.

There are three points you should be looking for:

* Where you picked up correct information.
* Where you picked up important information.
* Where you misheard something.

You can, if you wish, award yourself points for this exercise:

Add 1 point where you picked up correct information.

Add 2 points where you picked up important information.

Deduct 1 point where you misheard something.

Then add up your score. Of course there is nothing scientific about this, but it illustrates the importance of developing the skill of listening. For example, if you look back at the information on China, how much easier would it have been to remember if you had done some preparatory reading? This is even truer for listening, as you normally only get once chance to take notes and get them right.

**5. Taking notes in lectures**

Lectures are where students in higher education do most of their listening. Students are not normally encouraged to speak during lectures, instead they are expected to listen to an expert in their field discuss the subject being studied in-depth. A typical lecture lasts around 50 minutes and although many are now available online, you should be prepared to take note of the most important information you hear as you hear it.

Think about your lectures before you go into them.

**Are you prepared?**

If you are asked to do any reading or another task beforehand, do it. Tasks such as these are set because they will help you get the most out of the lecture and that, in turn, will strengthen your performance in assignments and exams.

**Do you know what you want to get out of this lecture?**

Think beforehand how this lecture will fit into your subject and the assignments and exams you have to do. Doing some pre-reading, as suggested above, will help you here.

**Are you ready to take notes?**

Have a note-taking method in mind before you go into the lecture and be prepared to use the same one throughout. You may decide to change methods in subsequent lectures, which is fine, but consistency will improve your note-taking skills and the quality of your notes. Before each lecture, look over the notes you took in the previous one.

**During the lecture**

Listen for key words and phrases that highlight important information (e.g. “The crucial moment came when …”). Develop your own easily understandable shorthand (e.g. KP = key point). Importantly, **make sure you actually listen** and don’t just write – a lecture is not a dictation exercise. Don’t spend time thinking about something you haven’t understood, put a question mark beside it and ask the lecturer, speak to another student or do some further reading.

**After the lecture**

Although it takes time, you may find it useful to re-write your lecture notes afterwards. If you have used a lot of shorthand you can fill it out again to make sure you understand it. Find out the answers to any queries you had. If you do that immediately, it will take no time at all; if you procrastinate, you will have a much harder job to do.

**Review your notes**

Once you have completed a series of lectures, spend some time looking over them all and write a summary of what you have covered up to that point. Your lectures are connected, which should be obvious in your notes.

**6. Practice**

**Reading**

Choose an article from the International Journal of Nursing Studies and use a different note-taking method with each one, then write a short summary (abstract) using your notes: <https://www.journalofnursingstudies.com/>

**Listening**

Choose a selection of TED talks and use a different note-taking method with each one, then write a short summary (abstract) using your notes: <https://www.ted.com/talks>

Compare your summary (abstract) to the original one? Did you miss out any important information? Did you include any less important information? Which methods have worked best for you?

**7. Useful links**

University of Edinburgh: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/imports/fileManager/IAD%20notemaking%20styles%20for%20lectures.pdf>

Mantex Information Design: <http://www.mantex.co.uk/how-to-take-notes/>

Open University: <http://www.open.ac.uk/choose/unison/develop/my-skills/effective-note-taking>

Open Learn: <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/>

Jobs.ac.uk: <https://www.jobs.ac.uk/careers-advice/managing-your-career/1006/top-ten-tips-on-note-taking#1>

Dundee and Angus College: <https://dundeeandangus.ac.uk/dmsdocument/434>

University of New South Wales: <https://student.unsw.edu.au/note-taking-skills>

University of Leicester: <https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ld/resources/study/notes>

**8. Appendices**

**1. Text for EXERCISE 3.**

Title: Should celebrities promote charities?

………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..Yes

(Part 1):

Some promotion by celebrities has helped powerful economic, social and political interests. But some celebrities, such as Bono, have developed international policies to reduce poverty and give indigenous people more power. They have used their fame to get attention for many different types of activities. Celebrities have made foreign policy more democratic by making it more public. Celebrities have brought attention to important international problems. And, very importantly, celebrities can use “soft power” techniques to change people’s opinions of solidarity and citizenship.

Celebrity activists can be a link between people in the West and distant tragedies. They can use their fame to make international events known. They can help the UN and NGOs by getting people to listen and act. Bob Geldof’s Live Aid and Live 8 got lots of people to donate money by showing images of famine with the pop music. George Clooney’s support for NGO projects in Darfur has made people aware of human rights issues there. It has also changed the balance between wealth and poverty, and had an effect on laws to end the fighting.

(Part 2):

We agree about the inequality in global capitalism, but we do not agree on celebrity involvement in charities.

You said that Live Aid helped the celebrities and their music sales. It is true that bands like Queen and U2 had this benefit. But only afterwards. Bob Geldof had to work very hard to persuade many bands to take part. Live Aid became a model for charity fundraising later, but when it happened, people did not know that it would make bands more famous, or raise over $100 million. The event showed that celebrities can be very powerful in commercial media. It made the public feel they were doing something useful.

I can see that all people do not agree about Geldof, but you seem to be more concerned about ending capitalism than discussing the different types of celebrity help. Some people say celebrity activists have no effect and no power. But this opinion does not consider how they work.

(Part 3):

You cannot see any difference between different types of celebrity activism because you can only see them all as part of one huge “celebrity culture machine”. This means you cannot critically examine the processes that have meant that celebrity activists are filling the space (created by lack of democracy) between the political elite and the public. Also, you ignore the progressive activism of some celebrities, who have fought for changes. Lord Byron, Charles Dickens and Mark Twain were all great reformers who used their fame to bring in democracy and social justice, and to criticize imperialism. Did Johnny Cash sing at Folsom Prison to talk about the injustice of US prisoners, or was he part of big business?

In 2003, Michael Moore, Tim Robbins, Susan Sarandon, Martin Sheen and Sean Penn all spoke against the war in Iraq. This could have been bad for their careers. In fact, they were accused by the right wing and Rupert Murdoch’s Fox News of being “traitors”. These are all independent actions, not “celebrity big business”.

………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..

No

(Part 1):

I am strongly against celebrities promoting charity because the global charity machine has many problems: charity allows social inequality to continue. Charity only helps the worst side of inequality that we can see. It makes the fact that global capitalism creates more poverty all the time seem rational. So charity helps put a “human face” on inequality in the world. And the problem becomes worse when celebrities like Bono and Geldof work with it, as their “star power” simply stops people from seeing the real social and economic reasons for inequality.

We can see the problems in both of the examples above. Live Aid and Live 8 did not help the Global South at all. They were mostly simply music shows, to improve the name of the celebrities, and the result was huge increases in the sales of their music. More importantly, almost none of the Live 8 agreements on debt and trade justice have been met. Also, there is more and more evidence now that George Clooney did more bad than good in Darfur.

What is most important for celebrity charity is the show and fame: it makes celebrities (and our political leaders) look caring; it stops people thinking about the real problems of inequality (that celebrities are now part of). This inequality creates the poverty that the charities try to help.

(Part 2):

What you say makes my ideas stronger. You said you agree with me about “the inequality of global capitalism”, but then you forget this when you discuss celebrity charity. To become famous, celebrities are very closely connected to global capital; they rely on the huge businesses of media and marketing. Geldof persuaded bands to take part in Live Aid to make the business work – and Make Poverty History criticized him for making it a business and not including African bands, to sell the show.

The real proof that celebrities are linked to money is that celebrities almost always choose to work with safe issues, not controversial ones. Live 8 did not do anything about the controversial issues of the Northern domination of the World Bank, IMF and WTO, or the need for universal HIV/AIDS drugs, or the regulation of transnational corporations.

You say there are different types of celebrities, who work in different ways. Yes, Bono, Geldof, Angelina Jolie, Oprah or Sean Penn may be “effective” in their own way, but how effective can they really be when they are all so closely linked to business and capital? And it is a mistake to make them even more famous by saying that some celebrities are better or worse than others. It is the celebrity culture machine that we need to destroy.

(Part 3):

You still cannot see the power of global capital. This shows how attractive capitalism is and that it is everywhere. I think all of us can be critical, and also still be under the power of global capital (celebrities too).

We should not make some, or all, celebrities into heroes. We should not look for radical politics in celebrities. You seem to do this, which shows how the business of celebrity culture everywhere is so glamorous.

Celebrity activists do not help democracy, but they take politics out of democracy. This means all types of people: business leaders, “expert” economists and scientists, and now celebrities, all give their ideas. This is an elite, top-down politics, trying to keep everything the same, but pretending to be “populist”.

The big problem is that this type of politics tries to make us, the audience, become the passive public. Slavoj Žižek, at the Occupy Wall Street demonstrations, said: “We want the power of the public back. We have allowed our work and torture to be controlled by others, we have allowed our love life to be controlled by marriage agencies, we have allowed our political engagement to be controlled. We want it back.”

………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..

Should celebrities promote charities? Adapted from: New Internationalist Easier English Wiki. [Accessed 11 July 2018]. Available from: <https://eewiki.newint.org/index.php?title=Should_celebrities_promote_charities%3F>

1. <http://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/VAK.doc> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)