

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**KAREN FOLEY:** Hello and welcome to the Student Hub Life boot camp. Well, a lot of people have been joining our sessions since we kicked off this morning at 10:00. If you've missed anything, you can watch the catch up which will be available very shortly after today's show. We've been chatting a lot and we've sort of been mentioning the various ways that you can engage with the chat, with our email, and with our Twitter handle, which is @StudentHubLive. And our hashtag is #StudentHubLive17.

But you've come up with some brilliant ideas as we've been talking about reading this morning and the active way in which we all read various different subjects. Now you'll see a lot of widgets coming up and we'd like to know which level you're studying, which subject area you're studying, and also whether or not you're used to taking notes when reading, if you're happy with the way you're taking notes, and when reading I mainly highlight the text, annotate, write my own notes, copy chunks of text, or none of these. We know that highlighting has been a very popular subject for discussion, and I imagine one that will come into play in our next session where we take a look at note-taking.

Now I'm joined by another member of academic staff. We've been running academic members of staff in to tell you about all these studies skills. And so far we've had Lisa from STEM, and then Azumah from Department of Education. But Suzanne's from religious studies, which is one of my favourite areas. And they're going to be doing some great discussions at our freshers event next week.

But your research interests in new and minority religions in Britain. I mean, you do some fantastic stuff, but here we are talking about note-taking today, and you've brought some lovely examples with you.

We've talked about this whole active process. And you know, it's very clear that the notes are the result of this active process of reading. So could you talk us through why it's important for students to take notes and what some of these notes might look like?

**SUZANNE NEWCOMBE:** Well why, I think, follows on very well from Azumah's talk about active reading. And one of the reasons to take notes is just to engage yourself as you're reading. When I was a student attending lectures, sometimes I felt like I was taking notes just to kind of almost stay awake

when I was 18. And you might need to do the same thing when you're reading. Not everything you read is as interesting to you as you might want it to be. So engaging yourself, being an active reader, underlining what's going on here is just one way to take notes that helps you at the time integrate and think about and really understand the material.

And a different important reason for note-taking is for assessments. It might be for an essay or for an exam. And you might do this the first time you read it or you might need to go back and read again. So you can read with a specific purpose in mind. What's the answer to this question you're going to be asked to answer for assessment purpose?

**KAREN FOLEY:** That's a brilliant idea. I just thought, I often take notes in meetings when I'm not quite sure what's going on, because sometimes you can get the sort of sense-- and we were talking before about students reading huge amounts of text and saying actually sometimes we lose track of the point.

**SUZANNE  
NEWCOMBE:** Absolutely, yeah.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So sometimes actually writing down the point can be a really great way to focus yourself.

**SUZANNE  
NEWCOMBE:** No, absolutely, absolutely. And how and where to do it is also really interesting. So for meetings and when I'm reading I've got my personal little journal where I just note things down. So if I miss something at a meeting, I know it's there. But actually this is a bit messy in terms of if I'm going to be writing an article or something. And so I use lots of different ways of writing notes depending on where I am. But just any way that I can capture something I'm thinking and know I can go back to find it. And particularly moving online, there's lots of other ways to take notes and to remember and go back and find things for revision purposes as well. So I'd really encourage you to both use the ones you're familiar with and maybe try some of the new ones that are more accessible and integrated with your modules.

Like for the religious studies courses, we've got online blogs, which we're encouraging people to use as a learning journal. And these can be really helpful because you can tag subjects. So you can look at what's going on to the exam and write little notes saying, OK, anything that relates to this question I can bring up here.

You can also do the cutting and pasting of text which is quite popular. But like when I was a student, you used to go to the library and photocopy loads of articles so you could take them

home and read them. But you might not actually read them. Kind of like the act of photocopying sometimes was instead of reading.

And you've got to be careful when you cut and paste text that you've actually read it and you've understood it because you can get a bit lazy because everyone's a bit pressed for time and we're all struggling to fit everything in our lives. And I think you're going to talk about that more later. But it can be helpful to know where to look for things again. But you also need to do the active reading and integrating it. And I think note-taking's all about the bridge between the two of, how do you find things later and how do you engage with them right now?

**KAREN FOLEY:** People do this in their own way. And I've seen at tutorials often students will bring their notes with them. And it's amazing the sort of range of ways that they take notes. And I guess the equivalent of what you're talking about in terms of highlighting big amounts of text is writing verbatim what that text says. And sometimes when they're doing assignments, you can inadvertently end up writing that because you're just translating things from your notes. How important is it then to sort of rehash things to sort of put them in your own words to make sense of something, in particular I guess when it might be quite a complex idea?

We've got a lot of STEM students in here today. And whilst the majority are at level one, we've got nearly a quarter at level two. So they're going to be coming across a lot of definitions and times that they're going to need to know note take. And some of those will be very important to understand in exactly the same way that they're formatted. So how might students go about this whole idea about identifying what's important and knowing when to cut and paste or copy chunks of text and when to maybe be a little bit more discursive about how things relate to each other?

**SUZANNE NEWCOMBE:** Well I think they're both very important skills. And maybe you do them at different times. First you might need to, particularly in something more STEM or mathematics-oriented, you might just need to memorise the definition. And for that you might think about kind of notecards or the old library card catalogue. And there's even online programmes now which create your own notecards.

But then when it comes to actually knowing that you understand them, I find I like doing mind maps. They're kind of STEM--

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yeah, let me show people at home.

**SUZANNE**

**NEWCOMBE:**

--STEM things. So I think when you do something like this, if you just take a blank piece of paper and write out a map of what you can remember, then you find the holes, the gaps in your understanding, and you can look those up again.

So on the one hand, some of it's memorisation, but also some of it you definitely need to put things in your own words. You definitely need to start thinking about which connections you naturally come to and which maybe you need to go back to your book and look at again in order to make sure you really understand.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

We ask people what they mainly do when they're reading. Let's take a look at what people said at a time. So most people are writing their own notes, which is great. A lot of people are highlighting texts annotating text-- this is changing all the time-- copying chunks of texts, and none of these. And just to sort of give you an idea Suzanne about who's out there right now, we've got arts and social science and STEM students. The highest percentage is other. So we've got too many sort of subject areas to really sort of identify, so it's just a bit of a potluck. But you might want to tell us in the chat what you're studying as well. And I know it's great for students to know other students who are on your module or even in your sort of subject area as well.

So it's good people are writing their own notes, and you've sort of mentioned why it's important to do that. You've also sort of said you do different things at different times. So what from majority of level one students would you recommend that they could sort of try in terms of different strategies to take notes? What sort of things do you think that they should give a go at, see if they like?

**SUZANNE**

**NEWCOMBE:**

I think that doing the by hand, something that you write with your physical hand often engages your mind in a different way. But also, everyone's lives are very busy, and so I think thinking about where you can think, where you process your information-- so I like taking notes in cafes because I find the background buzz really helpful. And I often outline essays in cafes. But also after I had my child and was very busy, I found walking the dog was an important place to mentally think about what was going on. So I started talking into my phone on the recorder so that I didn't look like I was crazy, but if I was thinking about something that I would have taken a note about but I didn't have my pen and paper there, I could just talk into my phone and then I'd go back to my desk and listen to my recording and write it out so it was easier to find again. There's some new interesting tools so you can go back and tag audio recordings if that's really your favourite way of integrating information.

**KAREN FOLEY:** What about Post-it Notes?

**SUZANNE** Yeah, they're great.

**NEWCOMBE:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** They're my personal favourite.

**SUZANNE** It's fantastic.

**NEWCOMBE:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** And everyone out there love stationary. Post-it Notes can be a really great way of doing things. And they come in different colours, which I think is very handy.

**SUZANNE** Absolutely.

**NEWCOMBE:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** How might students sort of use Post-it Notes and do you ever do that if you're sort of trying to write an essay or paper?

**SUZANNE** I certainly have done that in the past. And I was lucky enough to have a big blank wall in my  
**NEWCOMBE:** house at one point. And so I had lots of Post-it Notes that I was rearranging all over the wall in terms of these ideas go over here, this will be chapter two. But you can do that for a smaller essay as well, like this is the introduction section, these are all the different points I want to do, and then reorder them. And I think colour is a really good way to group different ideas and different subjects. And it makes you pay attention in a different way. I love different coloured pens as well. I try to organise things, but I think it's more just important to get it down and to keep your mind engaged. And the colours definitely help with that.

And the Post-it Notes can go in your books as well. You can get those little things that stick out.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yeah, the tabs.

**SUZANNE** The tabs, and you can write little notes on the tabs if they're bigger tabs. This is an important  
**NEWCOMBE:** definition. What's going on here? I don't understand that. That's another important reason to take a note saying I don't understand this bit. And then quite often with the active reading, if you read it again or you know to ask your tutor about it perhaps, then you can use the note-taking as a way of really having a dialogue with the subject and other people.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Helen has a question, because she takes a lot of notes but she says she doesn't often use them. So how can we hone these notes? I mean, it goes back to the point of what are they for? And I guess to some extent you're saying they help you learn, which they do. But particularly we're really just concerned about our assignments a lot of the time as well. So what might Helen sort of take from this?

**SUZANNE  
NEWCOMBE:** Well first of all I think the act of taking them is probably doing more than she realises, that just by taking the notes you're learning in a different way, more than just reading. So there's not a waste of time even if you don't refer to them again. But also when you go back to think about your assignments, just read through them and see if anything jumps out, because you might have forgotten something. And then you might need to take a new set of notes when it comes to your assignment to refer back to those notes and refer to your reading materials, the things your tutor has told you. So there's one set of notes as you're reading, as you're going along, and then you take another set of notes in preparation for your exam or your essay or your assignment. So you do different notes all the time for different purposes.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And I think it is very interesting to be able to look back on them months later and you can sort of get clarity and they can really crystallise where you were at at a place in time. I remember when I was doing memory I took some brilliant notes. I was so proud of them. I've kept them and they were very pictorial and I had all these sort of images. And I can visually remember them so well. And I really loved those notes.

And actually there were times when I think actually, even though I'm not maybe doing that, I can still remember those things and they'll come up in conversation. So it's all about the knowledge. And it was a subject I really loved at the time. So it's something that I find was worthwhile taking notes about just because it really helped me clarify things. And I feel better about it. Is there that sense of, this is our own learning, and to some extent that we're taking notes and sort of helping to clarify the area, we're investing in our future, the degrees that we're all doing at the moment?

**SUZANNE  
NEWCOMBE:** Absolutely. And it's about where you're at at this point in time and what you're thinking about and your understanding of the world. And one of the reasons I love these books is because I've been using these for the last 20 years. So I can pick one up off the shelf and say oh, was I really thinking that when I was 20? And it kind of can bring me back to the cafe I was sitting in when I was reading that book for the first time. And it's really interesting to be able to access

how your mind's changed, how your thinking's changed over a long period of time.

But even if you lose the books, if you lose your notes, you still have a better memory of them having gone through the process. It's not the object. It's the whole process and the way, your mind is changing and you're thinking about things in different ways.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Now is this a pen and paper type thing? I know that you sort of mentioned some of the more technical ways of doing things. But I would like to attend to this because some of our students are very organised and focus on things like taking notes on a computer. You mentioned some of the snazzy things like audio tagging and things that are far too complex to understand. But I know that there are some really nice mind map programmes that you can sort of access. And some students will take notes on a computer, just on a Word document--

**SUZANNE  
NEWCOMBE:**

Oh absolutely.

**KAREN FOLEY:** --or maybe PowerPoint as well. So they don't have to be too snazzy, but there are things that are easily accessible to help one make these links. Are they as good if you're sort of copying and pasting things on a mind map, or do you think that there is this benefit in actually physically doing something with what you're learning?

**SUZANNE  
NEWCOMBE:** I think there's those positive advantages and disadvantages to every method. And in some ways typing notes out just makes it easier for you to perhaps integrate them into your assignments. And you can have backups on the cloud, which is if I left this in a cafe, then that would be the end of it.

But I think that we're really about movement. And learning is about your whole body. And so doing things with your hands, kind of thinking about your study as you're taking a walk, as you're doing things in your life helps you learn. So there is something about pen and paper that's important, but also all these new gadgets online, taking notes on Word documents, backing them up on blogs, they're all good. So just try something new and don't drop what works for you if you know what works for you.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Well, there's been a lot of advice and a lot of tips and things. So I'd like to hear what people have been saying at home. And some people have got the jitters as they're starting their studies and I hear that people are really reassuring each other. So it's great for those of you who aren't new to the OU to tell our new students what it's all about. HJ, how's everything

going?

**HJ:** It's going well. Peter actually said he's really happy about starting arts and humanities with the OU. And Mervin likes all the advice in the chat in the session and is very determined now, which is great to see. And we've got people talking about how they do notes in different modules. So human biology might be a bit different styles than some of the other modules. And Tanya's doing exploring philosophy and exploring religion at level two. So she's going to be very busy I think over the next couple of weeks.

But there's a few people-- it's a while away, but they're already thinking about exams and how they can best make notes through their modules that they can look back at during the exams as well. And there's a few people wondering about the best way to put things in your own words when making notes as well, not just copying it out, which may be able to help us with.

**ZACH:** There's a lot of people nervous. It's only two weeks until the October start, so a lot of people are kind of getting that anxiety, which it's a good thing. Don't worry. There's stuff that you can do. Some of the courses do have inductions that you can do. There's some boot camps and more fresher events that we're doing here next week. Just make sure that you can organise your time. Make sure you've got space at home, whatever you need to do to help you prepare, just do so. And if you have any kind of thoughts or questions, you can just give us a call as well to kind of discuss that and we'll help you out as well.

**SUZANNE  
NEWCOMBE:** So with doing things in your own words-- and then I'll speak to exams-- I think what I usually recommend doing is reading the text, the original text, and then shutting your eyes and maybe having two or three breaths and then trying to write it yourself. And I would keep a note of where the original was because might need to go back to it.

I don't think it's so important for note-taking to necessarily write in your own words as opposed to copying it out. But when you go to your assignments and your exams you're going to have to do it in your own words. And we're interested in what you understand, not if you can memorise a chunk of text. So reading it, looking away, and then coming back to it-- don't look at the text when you're trying to take notes. See what you can remember.

And for exams, I think the most helpful thing to do is to read the specimen exam paper or the past exam papers at the beginning of your course, get some idea of the types of categories, the big areas that are definitely going to come up, and make a note of that. But just keep it in the back of your mind. Don't stress about what the exact questions are going to be. But you



know there's going to be a question on this aspect of mechanics or this bit about how people use language.

The old-fashioned way was I had notebooks with tabs, which very few people do that now. But you can think about the tabs. If you go back to the old-fashioned way, there's a tab for this kind of exam question. There's a tab for this kind of exam question. And you can organise your notes either in Word documents or some kind of online typing document or by hand. You can have kind of different sections for different categories. And I think just having those categories in the back of your head and reviewing them every now can really help you prepare for the exam. And then you've got this right structure when you come to your serious exam preparation at the end of the year.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So there's the sense, really, I guess what you're saying is that note-taking sort of is a process between what you're reading here and then what goes on wherever it is, and that some space can sometimes help clarify then what you might choose to write down so that really you're identifying the key areas. But also that within that whole process of reading a chapter and then consolidating various things and then coming towards the end of a module for an exam, the notes might look very different, because they have a different function. You're refining what you're focusing on. Perhaps with a different question you might be looking at something about linking things. You might be looking at a compare and contrast. You'll have a different way of using those notes.

So the notes aren't done in the sense. You can read a chapter and you can take notes on that chapter, but that's not necessarily done. The notes are always working for you as a learning aid and really sort of the way that you're sort of understanding the material that you're reading.

**SUZANNE NEWCOMBE:** Absolutely, absolutely. And that's why it's good to have notes that link you back to the original source as well, because you might need to read it in a different way when you come to the exam.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yeah, back to original sources. There's a bit of a conversation going on about referencing. And I think Suzanne wants to know if anyone actually likes referencing. I've never-- the library. I'll tell you, the library like referencing. You can talk to them about it on their 24 hour live chat. They'll love it. And Justin doesn't like it and Morty I think does.

But you know, this idea of being able to trace back is a good thing. If you can at least reference the page on the note, even if it is just the chapter and the page, it can sort of give

you that link back to the original contents.

**SUZANNE**

**NEWCOMBE:**

Absolutely. And it can be really annoying to get everything in the right format. And I mean as an academic, each journal has a different format and I have the same frustrations that you do trying to get-- well in our courses, it's OU Harvard style and trying to put the commas in the right place.

But the point of referencing is the way it trains your thinking. And I think it is really valuable in, does this claim need some evidence behind it and where can you find that evidence? And training yourself to think like that is really valuable and a really important part of study and learning at the university level. And without that, you've not really got half the point of understanding and knowledge at this level.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

Yeah, and even identifying just at a very basic level if there's a primary or a secondary source, sort of who's saying what about it and in what context.

**SUZANNE**

**NEWCOMBE:**

Absolutely, absolutely. And they're both very valuable. And a lot of what you're learning in the undergraduate level is how to use primary sources. To what extent is this valid? To what extent might this be a better source than an academic in a way? If it's a first hand account of a historical event, it has a different kind of importance to someone who's analysing it later.

So it's really about thinking, where did this knowledge come from, how authoritative it is? Is it a textbook that was from 30 years ago rather than today and we've changed our understanding of how the world works? So really thinking about where does your knowledge come from is an important part of note-taking and referencing. It's got a very important point in terms of your thinking and your understanding. It's not just annoying.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

I'd like to see what people are talking about at home because Conor we think is using avoidance tactics because he's gone out and bought those pens and Post-it Notes but he hasn't actually mentioned how he might be using them. So we'd be interested in your thoughts for all of us Conor. And also Julie, I'm really pleased that after three or four modules you've finally nailed referencing. That must feel amazing. Well done you. HJ and Zach, what else is going on?

**HJ:**

I do have to agree though, I like Conor's idea of going out and shopping for pens and paper and pencils. I think it's quite therapeutic when you're stressed out a bit about--

**KAREN FOLEY:** But you do have to use them HJ.

[LAUGHTER]

**HJ:** We had this discussion yesterday. I think some people would just like to have a pristine notebook and then not use it.

But I think Zoe, it's really nice. She says just about her future plans, she wants to go into publishing and she loves writing books and loves reading them. So if she can find a job down the editing side, she'd be over the moon, which is really nice to hear.

And Libby's got a really great tip actually. So she says, "I'm going to prepare a sheet of notes about the key elements of the TMAs, the EMAs, exams." So when she studies she knows what bits might be relevant to that. I really like that. And I've just put a little note because I really like that tip and I'm going to put it up on the board of one of our top tips for today. But yeah, I think everyone's happy and doing well.

**ZACH:** Everyone's good, yeah, a lot of chat. I have to agree with a lot of people, I'm definitely one of these people that has a lot of Post-it Notes, highlighters, binders, tabs. And it is therapeutic just having that there and getting set up and using it to kind of remind yourself of little bits and pieces. It's definitely a good top tip there.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So Zach, you came here today sort of hoping to get ideas from everybody about your own studies. And so what I'd like to know is what tips are you going to take from the readers that you're going to incorporate in your studies this year?

**ZACH:** Well, I'm quite liking the mind mapping. I'm quite liking the kind of note-taking. A lot of people on the chat have already discussed the kind of study skills section on their help centre, which is great to see. It's something I'm discussing quite a lot of time. So I'm going to rush back and visit that. And just overall there's a lot of discussion about kind of everything we've kind of discussed this morning, including using online notes. I'm someone who likes to type more than write because much like Azumah my handwriting is awful. So yeah, some good ideas to take back. I think I should be fine.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Good, you will be fine, you will. And the whole beauty of these events is sharing ideas. And as we keep saying, it's so important to try new things. So I hope you've got lots of inspiration that you're going to include in your learning.

Now Zach, you've brought us very nicely and appropriately to our last point, which is the help centre, because we do have these notes. We've got some critical reading techniques and some great books on note-taking for students. So you can find these at the study at the OU. And the help centre will have some books that will be really useful. So if you are keen to get going, why not take some time going through some of those so that you can start applying them to your learning? Tell us why they're so useful for students.

**SUZANNE  
NEWCOMBE:**

I think that even if you feel like you know what you're doing, it's really good to go back to the critical reading booklet and think about other questions you can ask. Are you doing all these processes and asking the right questions? And I think that even when I go back and read it after working as an academic for so long, there's things that I haven't done.

So no matter where you are in your study, I think it's great to go back and think about different ways of reading. Talk to your other students about how they find the best ways of engaging with what they're learning. There's always something to learn. It's always a conversation. And the online resources are absolutely excellent. I wish everyone had them. I wish I had them when I was a student.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

No, they are. They're really, really good. Well thank you so much Suzanne for coming along and filling us in. And thank you for all your advice and sharing ideas, et cetera, at home.

When you comes to the session we asked about whether you were used to taking notes when you're reading. 62% of you at the time said you were. We asked whether you were happy with that. 61% said no. So I hope you've picked up some new ideas and I hope that that widget has changed.

We're going to have a quick campus tour now where we're going to look at the Jennie Lee building. And then we'll be back for some time management. Also I must plug our next event which is our freshers, refreshers, and orientation events. That's for new and continuing series. We've got loads and loads of really fun things lined up. And I'm determined to find somebody who's going to give us some good dietary tips as well for our studying to get us off these biscuits that we keep going on about. So I'll see you in a couple of minutes for our session on time management.

[MUSIC PLAYING]