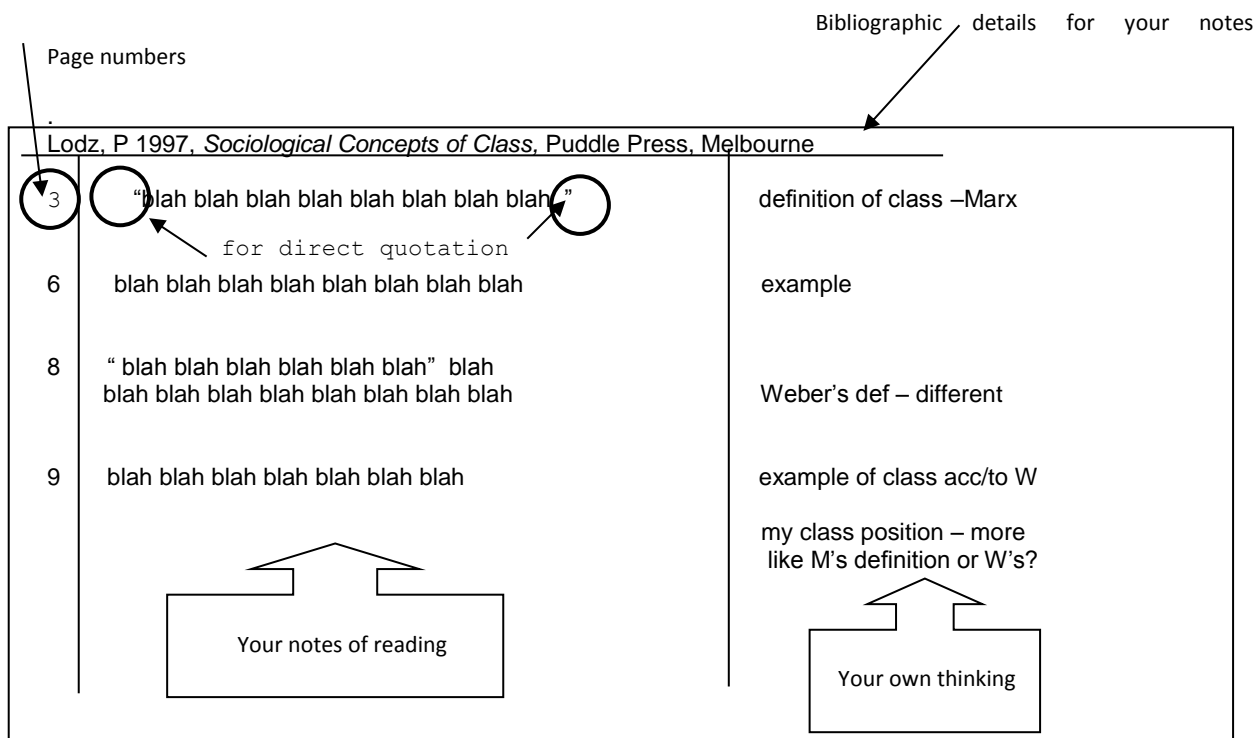


How can you take notes efficiently from various kinds of sources?

Different note-taking methods suit different kinds of texts, and serve different purposes. If you are asked to write a close, detailed commentary on a text, you may want to paraphrase and copy bits as you go. Make sure to note the page numbers from the text, as you will need them for your referencing; and if you set up your notes with a column for the notes themselves, and a column for your own thinking (*why did I take this note? How is it useful for my assignment?*), you can review them more easily when you are ready to write.

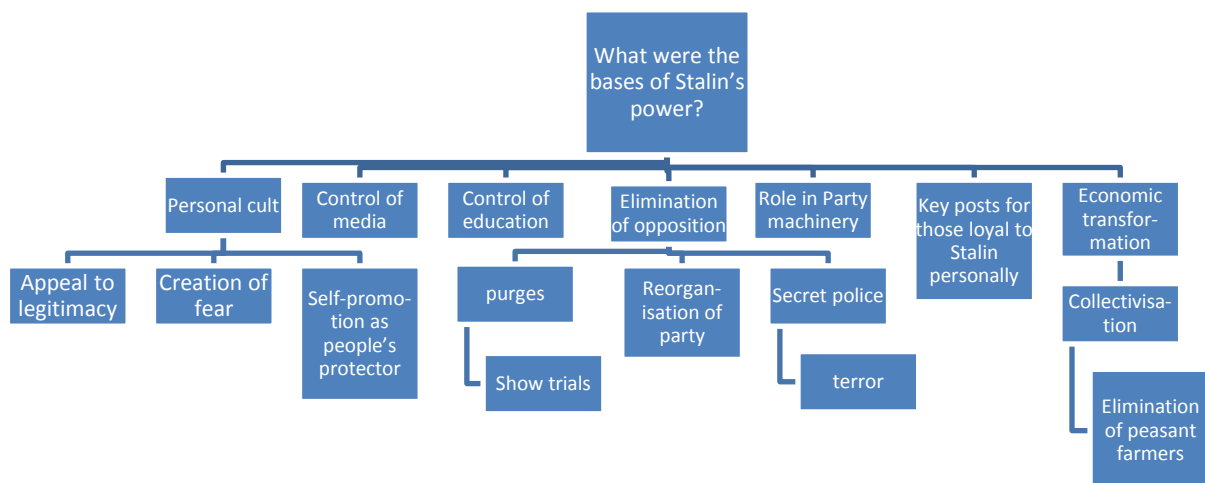


But what if you have a lot of articles to read, and you're uncertain of what you are going to find there, or what you may need to use in your assignment? Sometimes people waste a lot of time making copious notes that they will never use. Alternatively, people may read several articles without taking notes, and then have trouble remembering what was in any of them. Very diligent students often cannot tell when they have read enough and should start to write something! The format below is useful for recording very briefly, as you finish each article, what it was about and how it relates to your assignment and to other things you have read. At the same time, you can note what *kinds* of evidence it presents (not the details), and page numbers you can go back to if you decide to use that material.

|  |           |      |
|--|-----------|------|
| Bibliographic details: (Author, date, title, publisher [of book] city of publication); or<br>Author, date, article title, journal title, volume, pages [of article]) |           |      |
| This reading asks:   |           |      |
| The answer it gives is that:   |           |      |
| Reason:  | Evidence: | page |
| Reason:  | Evidence: | p    |
| Reason:  | Evidence: | p    |
| Reason:  | Evidence: | p    |
| Helps me understand:   |           |      |
| Problems/limitations?  |           |      |
| Connections with other readings?   |           |      |

**Pattern notes**

Some people find it helpful to make “pattern notes” or “mind maps” as visual reminders of how the ideas in a reading are related (for examples, go to James Cook University’s page, <http://www.jcu.edu.au/tldinfo/learningskills/mindmap/index.html>). This can also be a great way to plan your own writing, especially if you are not yet ready to decide what order things should go in. You can work out the relationships of ideas/information within sub-topics first, and then decide how to arrange those clusters in your draft.



### Grid notes

Another method of note-taking can be particularly helpful in enabling you to do your thinking as you go, so that you are well on the way to producing a draft by the time you have made your notes. This method is suitable for most questions that involve some sort of comparison (and many do, even if they don't have "compare" or "contrast" in their instructions. For example, you might be tracing the development of something over time – then the comparison would be between an earlier and a later stage of that development.)

Here is a general template, and below, an example of a more elaborated version.

| <b>Thing One</b>     |          | <b>Thing Two</b>     |          |          |
|----------------------|----------|----------------------|----------|----------|
| Points of comparison | Evidence | Points of comparison | Evidence | So what? |
|                      |          |                      |          |          |
|                      |          |                      |          |          |

### EXAMPLE

"How has life changed for the people of Upper Rivers since the 1950s?"

This kind of question, looking at how something has developed over time, is common in many subjects, and lends itself to a "what; how; why; with what effect?" format for analysis. The writer has started by dividing her material into 4 broad aspects: economic life, gender relations, family structure, and religion. Then, for each of these, she has compared how it was in the 1950s with how it is now, according to the sources she has read.

| Aspect   | What? | How?  | Why?  | With what effect?  |
|--|-------|---|---|--|
| Economic life  | 1950s | Hunter-gatherer economy                                 | Land unproductive for farming, no private ownership of land                     | Adequate, shared food resources and simple material life   |
|  | now   | Labouring in mine                                       | Investment by multi-national mining company                                     | Government sold land to mine. Locals lost rights to use land; dependent on selling labour; poor diet |
| Gender relations   | 1950s | Men hunted<br>Women gathered                            | Men's greater physical strength; gathering could be combined with child-rearing | Gender roles different but both valued   |
|  | now   | Men sell their labour; women are unemployed             | Where physical strength is essential, women are less productive                 | Men have sole economic power in family   |
| Family structure   | 1950s | Extended family lived in large group                    | Food supply adequate & no known alternative                                     | Resources shared   |
|  | now   | Nuclear families of middle-aged adults & young children | Poverty leads to decreased support for elders & young adults                    | Youth move to city to join cash economy  |
| Religion   | 1950s | Worshipped spirits of land and animal life              | Spirituality integrated with maintenance of food sources                        | Authority of elders derived from experience of living off the land                                   |
|  | now   | Christian   | Missionaries offer education to converts  | Traditions no longer respected, authority shifts to Church   |
| So what? Conclusion: Upper Rivers is more economically developed now than in the 1950s. However, development has entailed a heavy cost to the local people in terms of interdependence and equality between genders and between generations. |       |   |   |  |

(Adapted from Rao, V, Chanock, K, & Krishnan, L 2007, *A visual guide to essay writing*, Association for Academic Language and Learning, Sydney, pp. 60-62. This book is available free at <http://www.aall.org.au/teaching-and-learning-resources> )