



Hi graduate friends,

Happy New Year! I hope your holiday season was relaxing and filled with good moments.

Two of the most common challenges we hear about notetaking are “I don’t know what to take notes of” and “I don’t know how to take notes appropriately”. Reflecting on why you’re taking notes in the first place and what you want to do with the notes (your purpose) can provide much guidance.

Sometimes, choosing a purpose is easy. E.g., you might want to start reading about and comparing qualitative analysis procedures to select one that best fits your work. You may decide to create a table.

	Authors	Brief description	Pros	Cons
Constant comparative analysis	(Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012)	Two data, compare, categorize, bring rest of data one by one, recategorize	Not overwhelming because you start with less data	If there's an error/change, must redo from the start?
Thematic analysis	(Braun and Clarke 2006)	Search data to find repeated patterns	Clear process	??
Open & axial coding	(Cohen et al., 2007)	Put data in small groups, then look for connections between those groups	Commonly used, lots of resources on it	A bit vague at his point

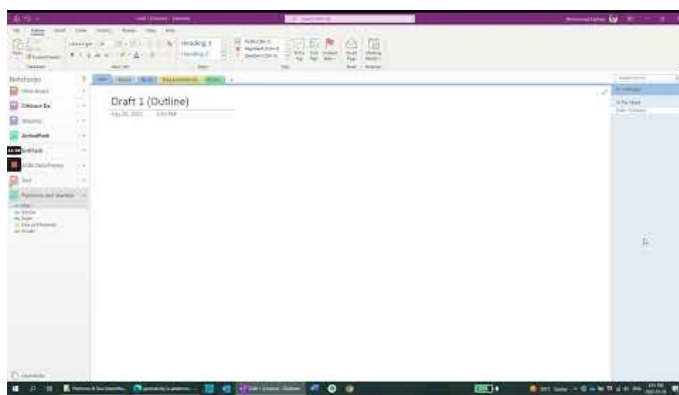
Other times, it’s not so easy to choose a purpose. You may want to summarize content now, make connections between concepts later, and have access to your notes on a bus without a laptop. Then you could consider combining methods. E.g., after you read a section, you may jot down everything you remember on

an index card. After a while, you may go back to review the cards and highlight important concepts or add possible connections in the margins. Before bed, you might write a reflective journal for 10 minutes about your readings or look at the margins of the index cards and create a mind map with those connections. You might also color code your cards to separate different chapters or reading lists.

The point is that there are many options for you to choose from. Research shows that both amateurs and experienced people often persist in using inefficient procedures even when much better ones exist (Fu & Gray, 2004). So, if you feel your notetaking can be improved, don’t be afraid to explore new methods!

Check out this amazing video to see an example of how one university professor takes their notes. Consider what their purpose is and how they shape their notes using that purpose.

If you have a favorite way of taking notes that work well for you, I’d love to hear about it.



Aldean Ellis (he/him), from your [Learning Development & Success team!](#)

GRADUpdATE is a monthly e-newsletter dedicated to helping students succeed in graduate school. This information is provided by Learning Development & Success, Room 4100, Western Student Services Building, Western University, Canada.

Reference:

Fu, W. T., & Gray, W. D. (2004). Resolving the paradox of the active user: Stable suboptimal performance in interactive tasks. *Cognitive science*, 28(6), 901-935.

Keyhani, M. [Mohammad Keyhani]. (2022, July 29). *An Approach to Note Taking for a Research Project with MS OneNote* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSje2K3tuT4>