

## **Just taking notes is not enough**

Jee Hyun Ma  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa  
United States

No one disputes the importance of notetaking in academic situations. Effective notetaking was essential 23 years ago when the article, *Reading to Take Notes and to Summarise: A Classroom Procedure* (Edge, 1983), was published; and it is still indispensable for students and professionals in this technologically advanced age (Kobayashi, 2006; Ryan, 2001).

Although published over two decades ago, Edge's (1983) practical methods of classroom-oriented notetaking for successful reading comprehension are still relevant today. It is always delightful to find a classic like this, which can be applied to real classroom situations irrespective of the times.

Edge (1983) stated that notetaking is difficult in one's native language and in a foreign language, especially for students who are expected to understand everything in a text. He presented an 11-step process of notetaking in detail using a real piece of material, which makes it easy for readers to understand and follow the steps. While introducing the steps, Edge reminded the reader that "the steps are only suggestions," implying that teachers could modify the steps considering factors such as students' academic levels, needs, goals, and time limitations.

Some teachers might be skeptical of the steps and argue, "The steps will not work in my class. The procedure is so complex and will take so much time. We have time limits and should cover quite a few things in our reading class. I will just orally explain how to take quality notes. That will be enough and save time." The popular phrase "Just do it!" might sound attractive, in this case, "Just take notes!"; but it often confuses and embarrasses students. For people who still doubt the need for detailed explanations and demonstrations using an instructor's notes, Kobayashi (2006) conducted a meta-analysis of 33 studies that investigated enhancing students' notetaking strategies. He found that providing a framework or using an instructor's notes was more effective and useful than verbal instruction alone. In fact, providing a demonstration saves students time in the long term. However, teachers should also keep in mind that personal notes contain information meaningful for individuals (Van Meter, Yokoi, & Pressley, 1994); it is important to give students ample opportunity to take their own useful notes so that they can become autonomous learners.

We must also remind ourselves that "the steps given are only suggestions." As a teacher I interpret this statement in the following way: We can skip some steps, emphasize others, or modify some on the basis of our own teaching experiences and often by the process of trial and error. For example, Edge emphasized pair and group work and provided an instructor's notes

using an overhead projector (OHP) for acquiring an efficient method of notetaking, with all of which I generally agree. By interacting with their peers, students can develop different perspectives on the same reading material and discover more efficient strategies by comparing notes among themselves. However, I disagree with the idea of giving one copy of the text to each pair, which is different from a real notetaking situation. Slower readers and introverted students that have a hard time speaking up would be frustrated by having to share the text. In these situations we cannot expect the “surprised pleasure” that Edge mentioned. I also disagree with frequently turning the OHP on and off, because it can easily distract students.

In his article Edge also suggested a one-paragraph summary as a final step. Unfortunately he did not fully explain this idea, which could be a shortcoming of the article. It is obvious that combining all notes for each paragraph does not necessarily make a good summary, as Edge admitted. A summary goes one step beyond notetaking. Students must be able to reorganize, analyze, and synthesize what the writer says to create a summary. Thus, it might be helpful to provide information on how to write a summary for students in addition to guiding them through the notetaking process.

Edge concluded that “the real test of good notes is their usefulness.” Students take notes to use them afterward. Therefore, students must discover and develop their own notetaking methods. They might use their first languages or techniques such as outlining, highlighting, or mapping. It is misleading to conclude that any one type of notetaking is superior to others or even the best match for all students.

The taking of high-quality notes is an ongoing process that requires practice on a regular basis. This feat cannot be accomplished within a day. As teachers we have the responsibility to help our students develop effective notetaking strategies and become better readers. In serving these goals Edge’s (1983) article is a commendable guide although published over two decades ago.

## References

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## About the Author

Jee Hyun Ma is a student in the PhD program in Second Language Acquisition at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. She has taught English to high school students in Korea as well as ESL

writing and reading in American university settings. She is a lead teacher in the reading curriculum area of the English Language Institute (ELI) at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.  
E-mail: [jeehyun@hawaii.edu](mailto:jeehyun@hawaii.edu)