

THE ELEMENTS OF NOTE-TAKING

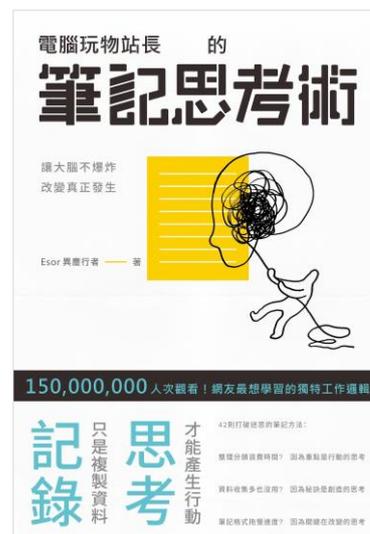
電腦玩物站長的筆記思考術

Do you consider yourself an avid note-taker? Do you take notes at meetings or in class because you think you should (this time, you say, they're going to come in handy), but always end up with full, useless notepads waiting to be thrown away? This book will break you of habits of redundant note-taking and teach you to take notes for the future, not for the past.

The Elements of Note-Taking is not your average self-help guide to note-taking strategy. Instead of jumping straight to diagrams and mechanics, it begins at the point where most of us go wrong: the simple principles behind the action. We take notes in order to focus our attention and guide our behavior in order to change the future. So it's no wonder most notepads never get a second look; backward-facing records of past information don't offer much help as we move forward.

This simple premise – that we should orient our note-taking toward the future, not the past – can motivate a revolutionary change in the way we manage information in our everyday lives. Author Esor Huang teaches us not how to draw graphs and boxes, but how to formulate guiding questions: How is the lecture relevant to what I need to know later? How will our current discussion help me fix a mistake, or handle a problem? Do I have the hours in the day to finish my entire to-do list, and if not, what's my next step?

Esor Huang brings patient rationality, sympathetic understanding, and unparalleled thoroughness to this detailed guide to day-to-day information management for the average modern person. His detailed, thoughtful instructions will help you bring reflection and strategy to your daily task management and information retention habits, smoothing your path to success in this digital world.



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THE ELEMENTS OF NOTE-TAKING

By Esor Huang

Translated by Roddy Flagg

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Chapter 1: Note-Taking Techniques — Input for Change

- Your notes are not a record, but a way of improving understanding and changing how you remember your experiences.
- You don't need to take notes on everything; you are not recording your life, but reorganizing it.
- Reflecting on a question changes the impact it has on you. Only then can it motivate actions that change you.
- Notes should lead to action, but this won't necessarily happen unless your notes are clear enough.
- Your notes are your thoughts, but thinking alone is inadequate! You have to physically make the notes to think things through clearly.
- If we don't refine the past, it cannot improve our future.

1-1. Change your memory

Your notes are not a record, but a way of improving understanding and changing how you remember your experiences.

Have you ever found yourself excited while making notes, but losing interest once you've finished?

Inspired by the lecture you're listening to or the book you're reading, you take pages of notes, but when you read over them later, you don't see the importance and can't remember what you were excited about. So you end up with books full of useless notes.

At some point I'm sure you've been listening to a teacher or supervisor and taken lots of notes, but when you come to review those notes you find they are disorganized and lacking

actionable information. The notes are nowhere near as useful as you'd hoped and actually hold you back.

So perhaps you read up on some note-taking methods or formats, or you buy an impressive-looking notebook to indicate that next time you're going to take more effective notes. And that is not a waste of time – after all, this book is about teaching you a note-taking method.

But if we were to give marks to different note-taking methods, those “improved” techniques would account for 40% of the overall score, while another “basic” method accounts for the remaining 60%. Get that right, and you'll make a passing grade and be able to take effective notes.

This method is to use your notes create and change memories.

Note-taking isn't about recording the past

When I was at school I kept a diary. Every evening I'd set aside ten minutes to record and reflect on what I'd done that day. Those reflections were a careful accounting of all my failings from the day: what had I put off, what mistakes had I made.

Though I maintained this habit diligently, I realized one day that I was making the same mistakes over and over again. “I procrastinated again today” was the usual start to my entries.

A record is a record. Even if you conscientiously create a list of all the things you did on a certain day, it won't change what happened. All you are left with is a never-ending diary. But keeping a diary wasn't a waste of time – I was just going about it the wrong way.

What is the point of journaling or note-taking? At first glance it seems to be to record your memories. But is that the case?

Look more carefully and you'll see that when we write notes, we're writing things that have already happened. Yet our real aim is often to change something in the future.

Type of Notes	Usual Method	Real Aim
Diary	Write what happened that day	Do better in the future
Course notes	Record the teacher's key points	Correctly answer exam questions
Meeting notes	Record what the boss said	Complete delegated tasks

Note-taking isn't about recording the past.

It is about recording the past in order to change the future.

Simply writing down things that have already happened moves us further away from our actual goal of changing the future. In the end, we've left ourselves a huge pile of notes which don't mean anything to us and which aren't of any real use, or are difficult to use.

If you want to take more effective notes, the key is to focus on your real aim and “take notes for the future.”

Creating and changing memories

Of course, things that happened in the past can be a valuable resource, sometimes even providing us with our motivation. But the real key involves how we interpret that information.

Writing “for the future” doesn’t mean never writing about the past. It means reinterpreting the past in light of what you wish to achieve in the future.

Perhaps we can describe this stage as an active exploration your memories to steer your notes in a more beneficial direction, rather than simply recording exactly what happened.

Recording events as they happen is a mechanical process. Yet the point of taking notes is to improve things, to do better in the future. You should not merely be writing down your recollections, but interpreting them, processing them, reflecting on them, and turning them into something of value.

Examining these reflections in light of future goals is the only way to get the future you want.

The first rule of note-taking is to “create and change” your memories.

That doesn’t mean you invent memories. For example, if I procrastinated today, I wouldn’t write that I didn’t. There’s no point in that kind of lie.

But I can use my “future gaze” to consider that failure.

- ✓ Did I procrastinate because I failed to find a simpler or more effective way of doing something?
- ✓ Did I procrastinate because I failed to create an environment in which I could concentrate?
- ✓ Could I try to do those things tomorrow, to see if they keep me from procrastinating?

It is a good thing to examine your mistakes. But simply writing them down won’t change anything; you have to examine them for clues to how you can change. Then your mistakes aren’t just mistakes – they are the steps by which you improve yourself.

Creating possibilities out of mistakes leads to learning.

This is the most important note-taking method, as it produces notes that “change” memory.

How do you view and tackle problems?

Rather than investigating our subconscious, one branch of psychology known as cognitive psychology looks to treat problems by changing how we understand the world. If you change your views and attitudes, then that which seemed to be a problem might disappear, or even become a source of motivation.

The problem is not the problem.

The problem is how you approach the problem.

Of course, this is not a book about psychology, but the same principles apply when taking notes. Regardless of what the problem is, the key is often not the problem itself but how you approach it. That is, how do you record those memories?

For example, I might conscientiously take notes during class so that my exams will be easier. But maybe I just jot down whatever the lecturer says, keeping it all neatly organized but not reflecting on it as follows:

- ✓ What might be in the exam?
- ✓ How could I best answer that question?
- ✓ What key points might I have to cover in the exam?

And so my notes won't be effective, no matter how much time I spend organizing them. All I'm doing is looking at the problem, not thinking about how I can tackle it.

The same principle applies when you note your failings in a diary or list tasks you're being given at work. Don't worry about the level of detail in your notes; instead, try asking yourself these three questions:

Why is this the case?

What do I think about this?

What changes do I want to make?

Why is this the case? Because of certain cause-and-effect relationships. What do I think about this? How do I understand the tasks, missteps or facts in front of me? What changes do I want to make? How does this question relate to my future? Try using this approach to change your notes. Next, we'll look at this approach to note-taking in greater depth.