Briefing document: How to take notes in the real world

When meeting with clients or other team members, it's important to make sure you come away from the meeting with all the information you can. It can be very embarrassing if you have to contact someone after a meeting to ask them to repeat something they said during the meeting. Note taking during a meeting is an important skill.

Tips for effective note taking

- Decide on whether you want to record your notes in a small shorthand notebook or a larger A4 pad. If you want to keep your notes in a ring binder, then a hole punched A4 pad is definitely the better option.

- Find a way of creating your notes that works for you. Start by putting the date, time and venue for the meeting at the top of the page (you can do this in advance of the meeting). Record the names of everyone present in the meeting. If it's a large meeting, you might want to make a record of where everyone is sitting – this will help you remember the names of people later. Use people's initials to record any comments they make that you think are important and might need referring to later.

- Make a conscious effort to pay attention to everything that is said in the meeting – concentrate on concentrating. It's easy to let your mind wander and miss a few seconds of the meeting – and within those seconds important detail might have been discussed.

- If the discussion goes off on a tangent or moves to a different topic, follow it even if you think it might not be relevant to the overall discussion. Something important might emerge from it.

- Write on one side of the paper only – this will help later when you are reviewing the notes and you want to perhaps make comparisons between different sets of notes.

- Develop a system of symbols or abbreviations that works for you. It might be that the same words or phrases keep coming up. Keep a notebook that reminds you of the abbreviations you use – otherwise you might find yourself unable to remember what your notes mean!

- Space your notes out and leave areas where you can add material later. You might even want to make columns so you can record actions or things you will need to do immediately after the meeting.

- If someone uses a word or phrase you don't understand, highlight it somehow so you can look it up later. Use underlining or put it in a bracket. Again, make sure you remember why you have highlighted it for the future!

- Remember that you are taking ***notes*** so try to keep them brief. You don't have to write perfectly constructed sentences. Use arrows to link ideas together. Use capital letters for important things that are said, or where a client or team member has emphasised the point in the discussion.

- Try to find time to read through your notes as early as you can after the meeting. If you leave it too long, you might read your notes and not remember exactly what they were referring to.

- When reading them, make sure everything makes sense to you. Add some extra explanation if you need to so that when you read the notes again later you will understand them.

You can use these tips for taking notes in the classroom and the lecture theatre – sometimes the skills from school and college are very useful in the outside world!