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First Year Law Intensive June 2015

Effective and Efficient Reading

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How to Read? – D'uh I know how to read!

As an experiment, Dr. Perry (psychologist), Director of the Harvard Reading-Study Center gave 1500 first year students a thirty-page chapter from a history book to read, with the explanation that in about twenty minutes they would be stopped and asked to identify the important details and to write an essay on what they had read.

The class scored well on a multiple-choice test on detail, but only **fifteen students** of 1500 were able to write a short statement on what the chapter was all about in terms of its basic theme. Only fifteen of 1500 top first year college students had thought of reading the paragraph marked "Summary", or of skimming down the descriptive flags in the margin.

This demonstration of **"obedient purposelessness"** is evidence of "an enormous amount of wasted effort" in the study skills of first year students. Some regard it almost as cheating to look ahead or skip around. To most students, the way they study expresses "their relationship to the pressures and conventional rituals of safe passage to the next grade".

Reading for Law

- Studying law requires reading a lot of material
- Different kinds of material
  - Textbooks
  - Cases
  - Statutes/legislation
  - Journal article
  - Monographs
  - Lecture notes or powerpoint slides
  - Blogs, wikis, magazines, journals

Reading for Law

- During your studies you will read for different purposes
  - Background knowledge
  - Preparation for class – lectures and tutorials
  - Answering tutorial questions
  - Answering quiz questions
  - Assignment writing
  - Exam preparation

- How you read will depend on this combination of **what** you are reading and **why** you are reading
  - Reading a textbook for tutorial preparation
    - Background information
    - Need to get a overall picture of the issues and concepts
  - Reading a case to answer an assignment problem question
    - Need to identify whether the case is relevant to this question
    - Need to scan most of the case and focus on the relevant sections
  - Reading a journal article to answer a tutorial or quiz question
    - Need to find specific information within the journal article

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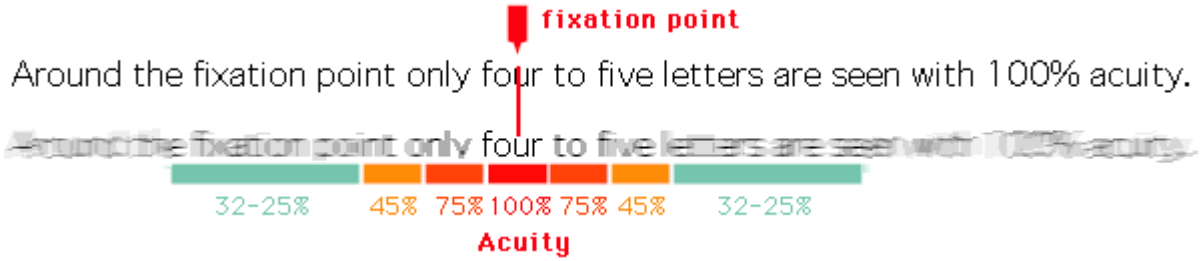
Eye movement and reading

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPA-LAAMuHE
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSEWrbcrFc0



Improve Your Reading Skills

- Reading speeds improve with practice.
- Faster reading happens when you can capture the meaning of phrases and sentences without having to ‘fixate’ on every word or second word
- A simple way of developing the habit of taking in more than one word per fixation is to take a page of text and divide it length ways into three with two lines drawn down the page. Using a pen or pencil as a pointer, read each line of text by allowing your eye to fall only in the middle of each of the three sections, as indicated by your pointer.
  - Don't worry about how quickly you are reading but instead, concentrate on reading the line in only three fixations.
  - As this becomes more natural, practise without drawing lines.
  - Later, reduce the number of fixations to two per line.
  - Once this increased word span becomes a comfortable habit, an increase in your reading speed will occur.

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Reading exercise

The idea that some books are used merely for reference purposes and are nice to have around in case you need them seems to be ignored in our schools. Sir Francis Bacon once said that some books are to be nibbled and tasted, some are to be swallowed whole, and a few need to be thoroughly chewed and digested no matter how trivial the content. No wonder many people dislike reading.

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Strategies for Reading

- Survey
- Scan
- Skim
- Read
- Close and critical

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Survey

- First decide
  - What sort of material it is
  - Why you need to read it
- Consider the context
  - How does this reading fit into the content of the unit as a whole?
  - Who wrote this? Is it someone with authority?
  - Where is it published? Is it scholarly? Peer reviewed?
  - Why is it prescribed or recommended?
  - If it is a book, look at the table of contents, the index etc

Scan

- Scan
  - Read the introduction and conclusion
  - Read the heading if there are headings

- This gives you a sense of the topic area and central thesis.
- If there are headings, it gives you a basic sense of the structure

skim

- Skim
  - Read the introduction and conclusion (if you haven't already done so)
  - If it is a case, read the headnote
  - Read the first sentence of each paragraph
  - You may need to read the second or last sentence of some paragraphs (if the first sentence is not informative)
- This gives you a pretty good idea of what the author is arguing
- Gives you a good sense of structure of the material
- You will identify key phrases and important ideas
- You might stop here if you are reading for background and short of time

Read

- Read
  - Read the material by focussing on groups of words and phrases.
  - You are not trying to read in a strict 'linear' fashion
  - You are not reading each word carefully
  - Your eyes should be moving across the page quite quickly
  - Find sections that seem to contain the key arguments or issues. If you are reading for an assignment, for example, you will be looking for key words, phrases etc
  - When you hit key arguments and issues, slow down and focus more.
  - Make notes in the margins – one or two words to indicate what this section is about

Close and Critical

- Close and critical
  - Select important sections of important materials
  - Be aware of the structure of the material or the section of it you are focussed on
  - Explore the details
  - Look at the footnotes
  - Evaluate the argument in each paragraph or section
  - Think about any underlying assumptions
  - What has **not** been addressed? Why?
  - What are the strong arguments? What are the weak arguments?

Taking Notes

- Why are you taking notes?
  - Revision for exams
  - To help focus your reading
  - To help you remember the ideas
  - To keep a record of what is said
  - To use as a quote in an assignment
  - To identify questions and comments for discussion
- These are all good reasons for taking notes
- Note-taking enhances your memory and understanding of material

Taking Notes

- What are you taking notes of?
  - Readings eg textbook, case etc
  - Lectures
  - Tutorial discussions and answer to questions

Structure of Your Notes

- Linear
- Patterns eg concept mapping
- Flowchart
- Visuals or graphics
- All over the joint
- Some combination of these

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Typed v handwritten

- Typed
  - Neater
  - Easy to read
  - Can use different fonts
  - Can use columns
  - Can find apps for flow charts
- Handwritten
  - More flexible
  - Can incorporate charts, diagrams, columns, flowcharts
  - No technology needed to make them or use them

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formats

- Try using different formats for your notes
  - Linear or outline
  - Mind maps
  - Flow charts
  - Columns and tables
  - Boxes and arrows
  - Headings and indents
  - Dot points
  - Pictures and visuals

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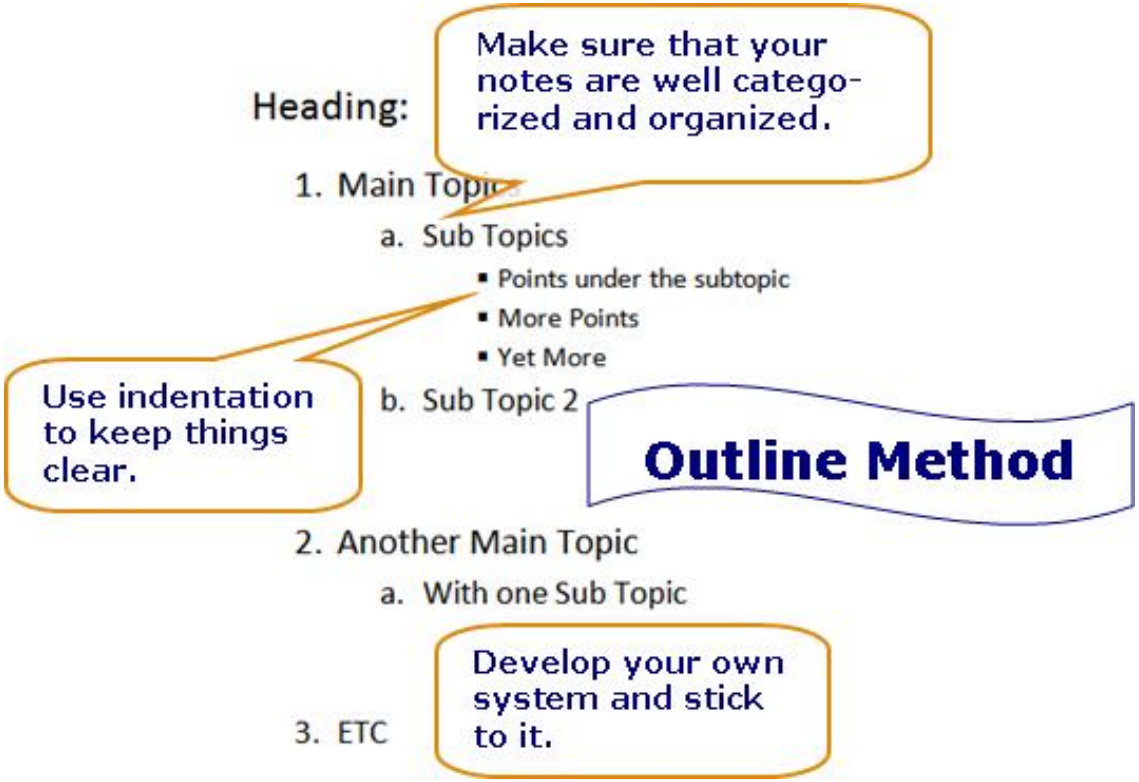
Outline



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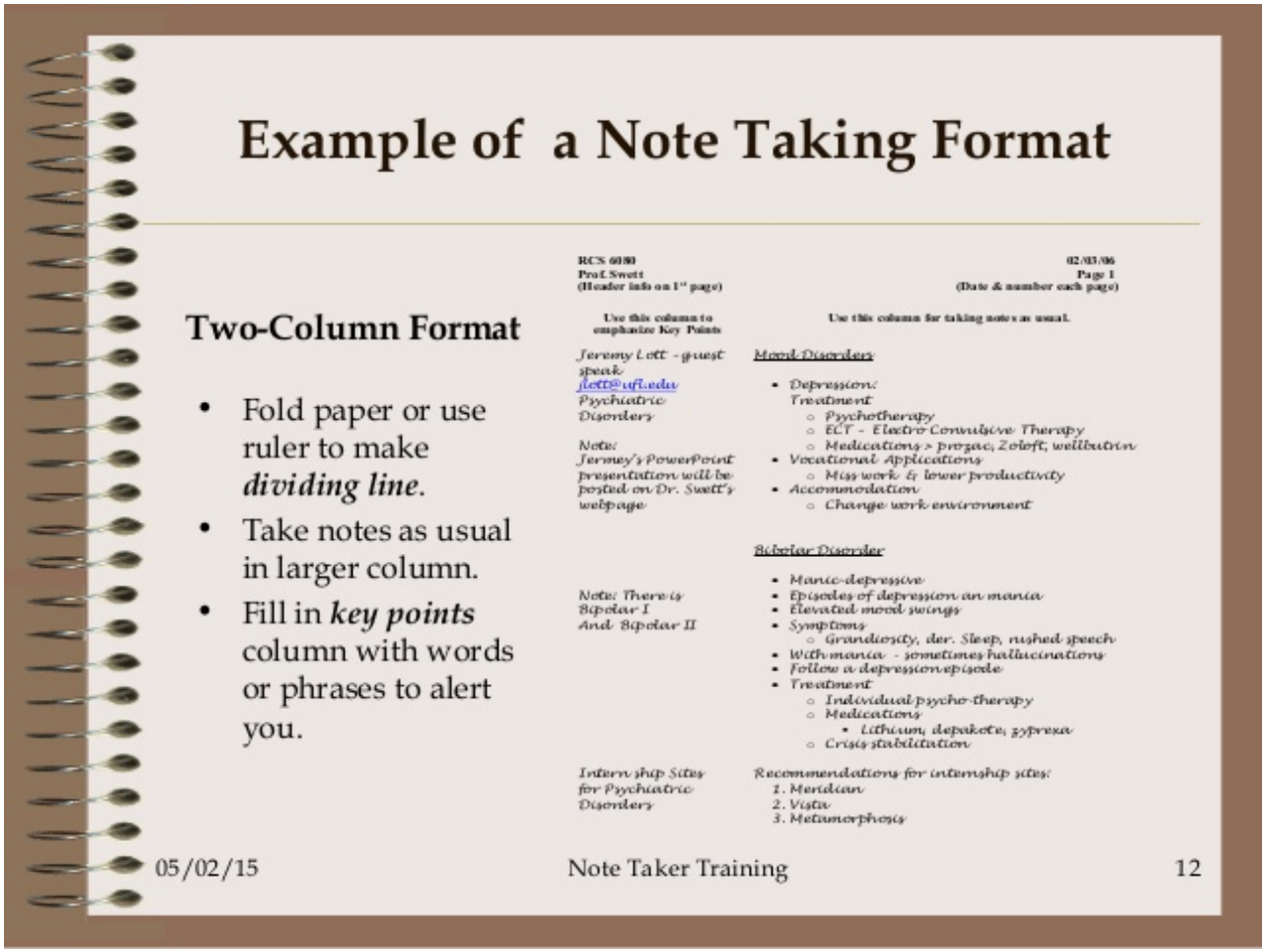
Columns



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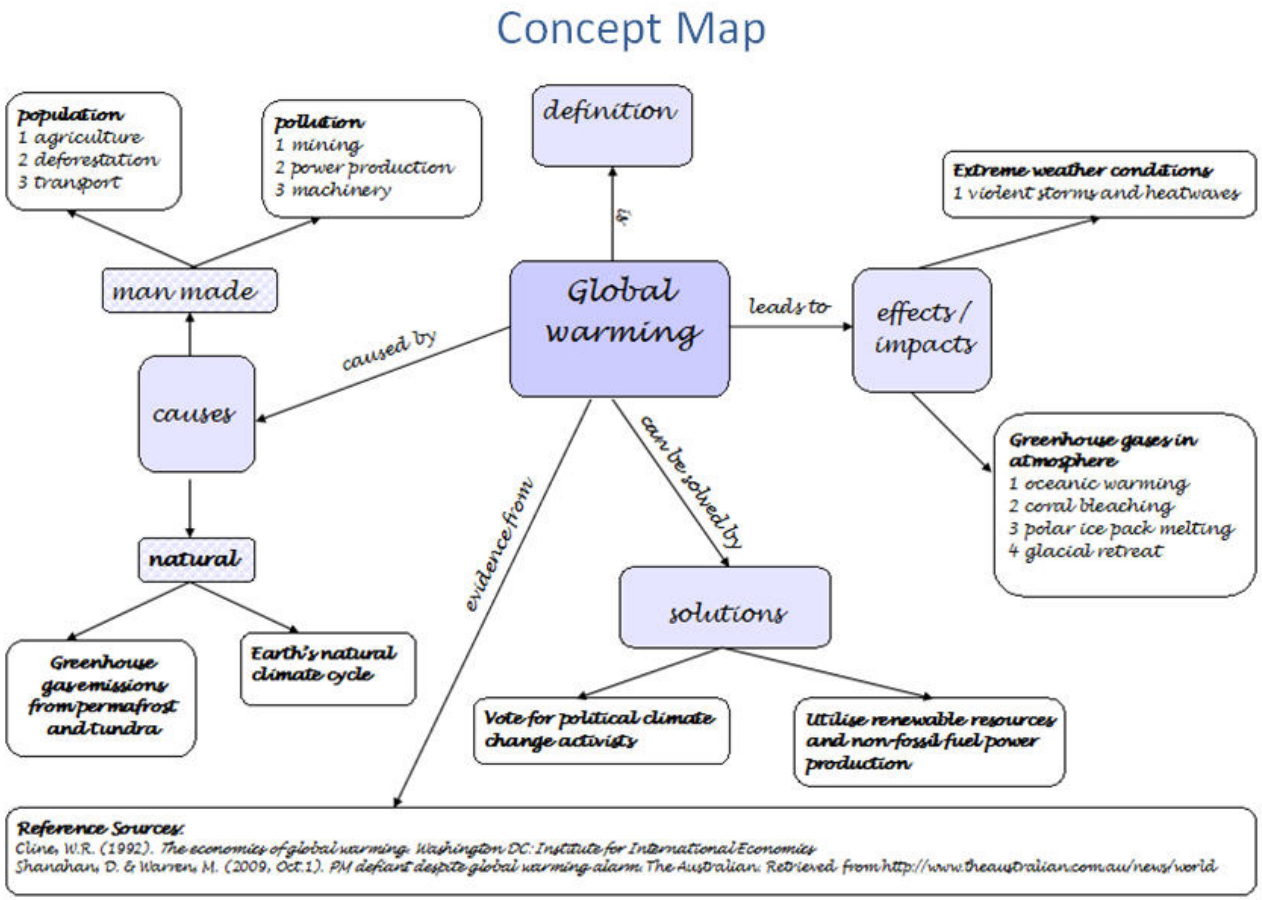
Flow chart



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Mind-mapping

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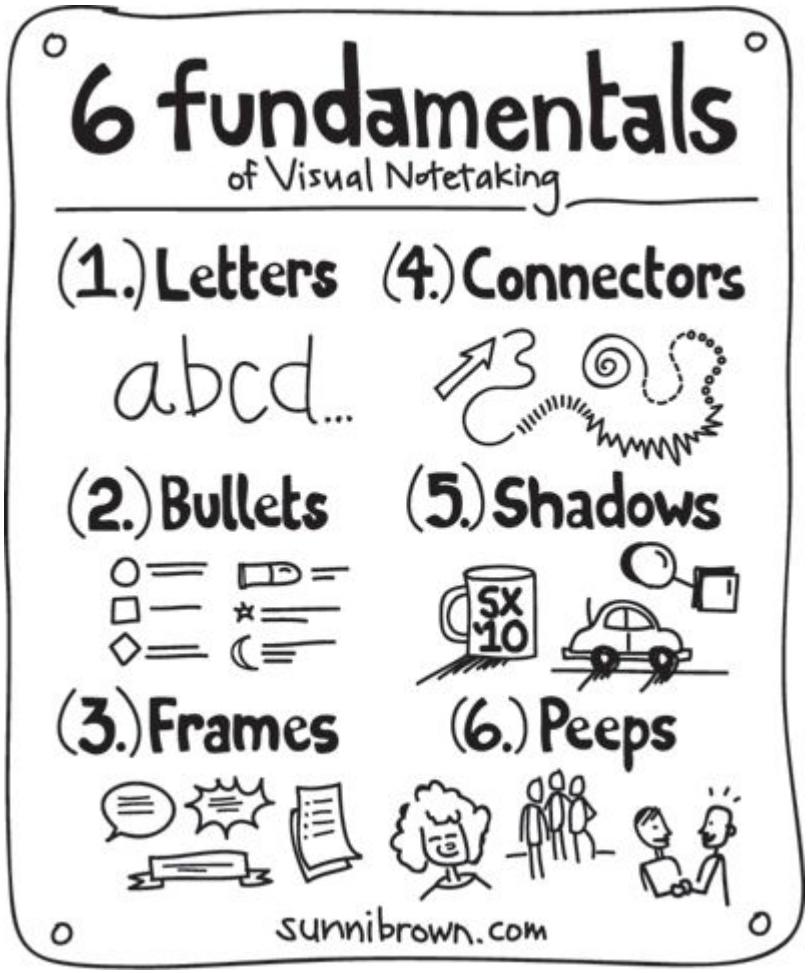
Images and drawings



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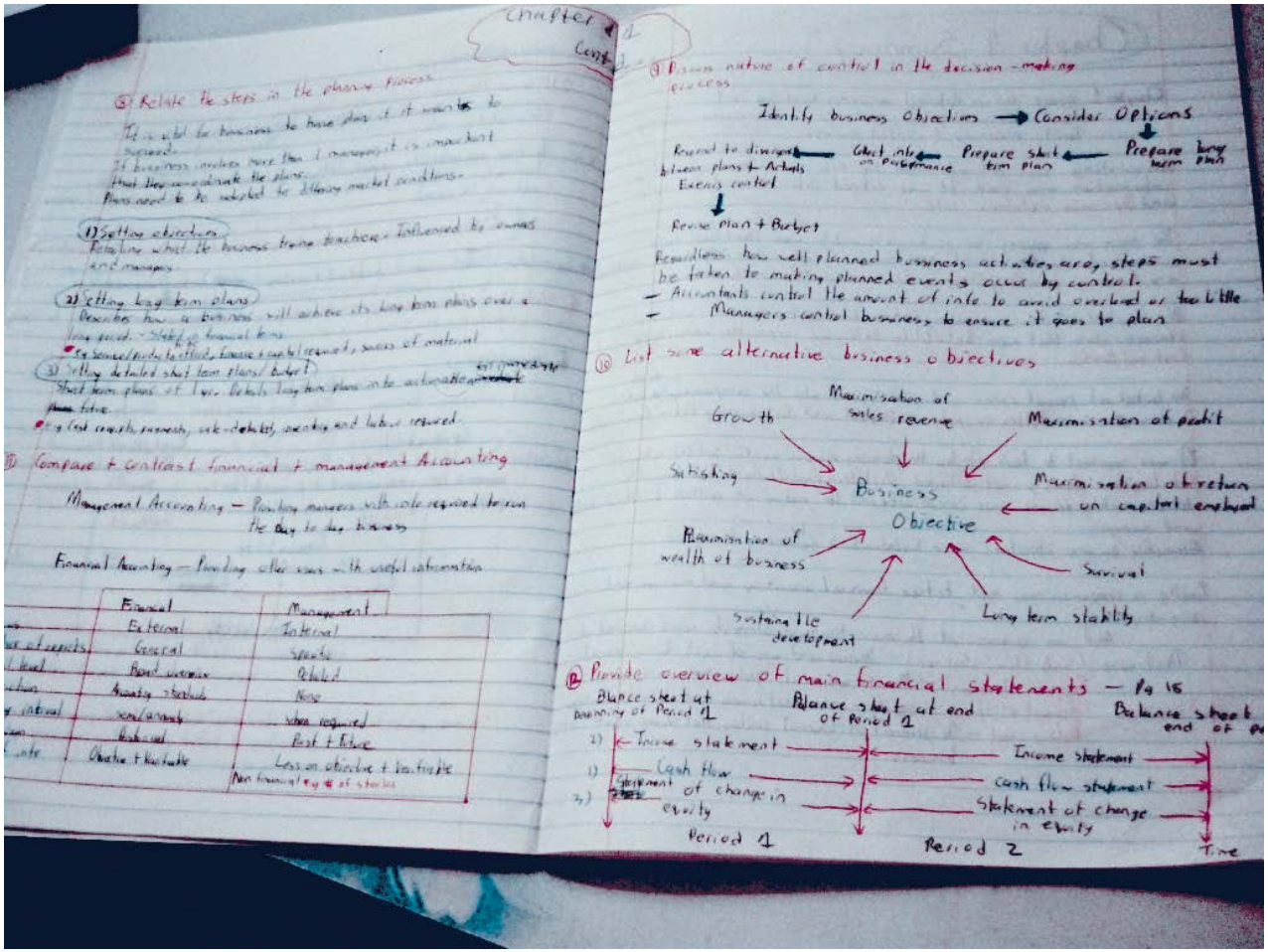
combination



Effective Reading – Exercise

- Assume you have been given the following essay topic to research:

  Animal law and policy over the last 50 years have reflected changing patterns of urban development and increasing density of urban life. Discuss, with reference to NSW law.

- Does Borthwick's article provide any useful information or authority on this point?