

Note making

Information and study skills workbooks cover areas such as:

- navigation of and services offered by Frewen and Eldon Libraries
- how to find information sources in a variety of media using a range of sources including databases and the World Wide Web
- referring efficiently and accurately to the information used (bibliographic reference and citation)
- evaluating sources you have found
- how to take notes effectively
- preparing for and sitting exams
- how to work in groups
- how to give presentations

For a full list of available titles visit the Information and study skills website

<http://www.port.ac.uk/infoskills/>

Or contact Martin Hampton

Telephone: (023) 9284 5562

Email: martin.hampton@port.ac.uk

Written by Ian Mayfield

Edited by the Information and Study Skills Editorial Board

Telephone: (023) 9284 3239

Email: ian.mayfield@port.ac.uk

First Edition July 2001

ISBN 1 86137 241 8

Revised August 2002

All rights reserved; no part of this publication may be photocopied, recorded or otherwise reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any electrical or mechanical means, without the prior permission of:

Learning Media Development

University of Portsmouth

Portland Building

Portland Street

Portsmouth

PO1 3AH

Telephone: (023) 9284 2462

Email: lmd@port.ac.uk

nm0802

Contents

1 Learning outcomes	5
2 Note making issues	5
3 Why make notes?	6
4 Effective note making	7
4.1 Lectures	7
4.2 Seminars and tutorials	8
4.3 Meetings	8
4.4 Notes from reading	8
4.5 Notes from websites	9
5 Organising your notes	9
6 Techniques and tips	10
6.1 Methods of note making	10
6.2 Use of coloured pens	11
6.3 Highlighting	11
6.4 Abbreviations, code and shorthand	12
7 Final exercises	13
Key skills	14
Appendix one	15
Appendix two	16
Appendix three	20
Feedback form	23

Note making

All of the exercises within this workbook are for your reference only. The benefit to you in completing them is that you will remember more if you actively engage with the material rather than just read through it. Your tutor may also ask to see the completed workbook.



By now you will have had a taste of lectures and making notes from them. How do you feel you are coping? Tick one box.

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| No problems | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ok | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Some problems | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Haven't been | <input type="checkbox"/> |

This exercise will be repeated at the end of the workbook. See if you tick the same box after working through the workbook.

1 Learning outcomes

By the time you have finished this workbook, you should be able to:

- explain the purpose of note making in lectures and from readings
- explain the principles behind effective note making
- explain the importance of organising your notes
- evaluate approaches to note making which might suit you
- summarise some useful techniques and shortcuts

2 Note making issues

Note making is a skill which is often assumed to be easy but which in practice students often find difficult and/or do badly.



Tick any of the following statements which are true for you:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| I try to get down as much as possible of what the lecturer says. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I rarely look at my notes till exam time. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I feel insecure in lectures when other people are writing more than me. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I find I often can't read my notes. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I find it difficult to decide what to note down when reading. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| When I read through my notes I don't always understand what they mean. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I do a lot of underlining/highlighting when reading. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I can't see the point of taking notes. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If any of the above are true you may well benefit from thinking more about what you are doing and some of the ideas in this workbook may help.

3 Why make notes?

In note making, it is important first of all to be aware of the reasons why you are doing so in any given situation (eg lectures, reading etc). Then, you need to match up your reasons for taking notes with the method appropriate to the particular instance.



Write down at least three reasons why you might make notes:

1

2

3

Compare your list with the one in Appendix 1. You will probably find your points are amongst those listed, though there may be others which you hadn't thought of.



These reasons for making notes are inter-related. The two key points are understanding and retention: ultimately your aim is to understand and remember the material.

Other reasons, such as noting key points are really means towards those ends. Prompts for further study or references to follow up are also aimed towards furthering your understanding. Understanding and retention are also related: you will remember the material better if you first understand it.

You should also be aware of how and when you are going to use the notes:

- are you focusing on a particular assignment?
- or will your notes be used mainly for general revision?

The answer to this might affect how you approach your note making.



Remember that there is no point whatever in taking notes if you are never going to look at them again; keep in mind an idea of when you are likely to return to the notes and in what way you will want to use them at that time.

4 Effective note making

Perhaps the most important point of all about note making is there is no single method which is appropriate for everyone. Your notes are for you alone and the main thing is that you think about what you are doing and work out a system which suits you. Good organisation is crucial and this will be dealt with in the next section.

First, though, a few points to remember about note making in different situations. This may help you to develop different strategies for note making depending on what learning environment you are in. It is often useful to distinguish as you may wish to revisit lecture notes soon after making them to highlight possible revision topics etc but may be perfectly happy with the notes you have made from books or journals as you may only need them whilst you are writing one assignment.

4.1 Lectures

It is not easy to listen, think and take a coherent set of notes for 50–60 minutes.



Bear in mind that your aim is understanding, the most crucial thing is to think about what you are listening to or watching.

Especially at the start of a lecture, when the structure and main themes may not be clear, it's easy to feel insecure and worry that you should note things down *just in case* they're important. Try to resist this temptation and at first just listen and understand.

Do be guided by your lecturer though, they often give vital clues such as:

“You’ll need to note this down. . .”

or

“No need to note this down as I’ll give you a handout at the end”.



It is also a good idea to get into the habit of noting down the date, lecture title and name of the lecturer just in case you need clarification on certain points.

Unless the lecture is poorly delivered, it should be structured in such a way that the main themes will be outlined at the beginning and then clearly identified again when they are addressed in detail. So take in the main topics at the beginning, and write only when you reach them later.

Above all, avoid writing without thinking: it is far more important to understand and record key points - including a note of anything which you *don't* understand, and will need to ask or read about later - than to take down masses of information indiscriminately.

Your notes from a lecture are unlikely to be neat and perfect. Your lecturer has a limited amount of time to deliver key points and it is unreasonable of you to expect that you can

write in your best handwriting, use correction fluid to block out mistakes and draw nice neat tables etc.

You will almost certainly have to go back over your notes and re-write them or highlight and organise them differently (see section 5 and 6 for details).

4.2 Seminars and tutorials

The same general principles apply as for lectures, but there is the additional complication that you are likely to play a more active part yourself and this makes it more difficult to make notes on what is said.

In these cases it is probably a good idea to reflect on the session soon after it is over, and to compare notes with your fellow students if you can. Once again, concentrate on only taking down information which is useful and which you will want to return to.

4.3 Meetings

From time to time you may be involved in meetings, for example in planning work for a group project.

It is very important that you record what has been agreed so that you are clear about questions such as who has agreed to do what, what deadlines have been set etc.

These are important principles which are likely to stand you in good stead in a later professional career too.


Even if you take your own notes, it is a good idea to ensure that someone is given responsibility for taking an 'official' record of the meeting which is later circulated so that everyone knows what is planned. You could take it in turns to take on this responsibility.

4.4 Notes from reading


Unlike a lecture, when you are making notes from a book or journal article it is possible to return to the original if you wish to so you don't have to worry so much about missing things. With this in mind, many people recommend that you should read through the entire chapter or article, concentrating on understanding its contents, before writing any notes at all. The following approach is suggested:

- read through the whole piece
- go through it again, concentrating on identifying the key points
- re-write these points in your own words, keeping in mind the focus of your argument/question/topic


This process will ensure that you engage with the material and understand it rather than simply copying chunks from the book.


-  Many people find it useful to use stickies or Post-it™ notes when making notes as these enable you to highlight areas in books without marking the text.

When you are making notes from books and articles it is always worth looking at the date of publication; is the information still relevant?

-  For further information on using and assessing books in relation to your needs see the workbook *Using books effectively*.


You should also get into the habit of noting down the full title of the book (and chapter within the book if appropriate) or journal (and also of the journal article title), the page numbers and the author. This will help when you have to reference your source in a reference list and/or bibliography.

-  Remember that if you do include quotations from published works in your essays, these must be used sparingly and be properly acknowledged.


-  For further guidance see the skills workbooks *Using other people's work* and *Bibliographic reference and citation*.

4.5 Notes from websites

Due to the rapid growth of the World Wide Web making notes from websites is now a common occurrence amongst students.

-  Not only is it necessary that you note every URL that you are making notes from but also that you note the date on which you accessed the information.

It is also important to remember that most websites undergo no censorship nor quality control procedures. Therefore it is imperative that you evaluate websites in relation to your needs before making notes from them.

-  For further information see the skills workbook *Evaluating websites*.

5 Organising your notes

It is very important that you organise your notes carefully. The most important thing is that you need to know what each set of notes refers to, but you also need to think about questions such as how to file your different sets of notes, make it easy to add further notes later, etc. Important points include:

- Source: make sure each set of notes is clearly marked to show when they were made and from what. For example, date and topic of lecture (or number within a series, unit code etc); full details of the work from which reading notes are taken (in order to avoid you having to check things later).

- Space: leave plenty of space for additional notes, for example by
 - leaving blank space between sections
 - using wide margins
 - using only alternate pages
- Flexibility: organise your notes in such a way that they can be re-sorted and new material can be inserted easily. Loose-leaf folders are recommended.

6 Techniques and tips

6.1 Methods of note making

For most people, the most usual way of taking notes is simply to record key points in the order they are made.

However, it can be more useful to construct your notes in such a way that relationships are shown, reflecting for example the structure of the lecture or the relationship between the key ideas in a reading. This can be difficult to do in a lecture, when the structure may take time to become clear. It may be easier, though, if you are taking a note from a book, or perhaps it might be useful to re-visit your lecture notes and re-write them in this kind of way. Possible ways of showing notes diagrammatically include:

- 'patterned' notes, as advocated by Tony Buzan (1995) sometimes known as 'Buzan diagrams'
- a flow chart
- a matrix

Examples of all of these are shown in Appendix 2.



Read the following paragraph and make notes on it using a diagrammatic method rather than linear notes:

Portsmouth is seen, of course, as one of the great naval cities in the world. Indeed, had its natural deepwater harbour facilities not been initially developed by Henry VIII for his fleet, the present day development of the Portsmouth area would have taken a very different economic and social path. However, inertia remained sufficiently strong to ensure that the Ministry of Defence was still the major employer of labour in the Portsmouth area until after World War II. To the naval dockyard facilities had been added naval shore establishments and other Ministry of Defence functions. It would not be uncharitable to suggest that such development was not entirely to the advantage of Portsmouth. This monopolistic situation meant that other firms were slow to come into the area and certainly the commercial port facilities have grown only slowly. In sharp contrast Southampton, at the western end of the South Hampshire corridor, grew up with a more diversified economic structure, as dominated by its commercial port function as Portsmouth was by its naval associations. Between the two urban centres lay an area of semi-urbanized land with an economic specialisation of market gardening, in particular that of strawberry production (Bateman, 1974, p.42–58).

Write your answer overleaf.



Compare your notes with those shown in Appendix 3.



Of course, making notes in this way does not suit every situation nor every person. Remember again that your notes are for you and should be made in whatever way suits you best.

6.2 Use of coloured pens

It can be useful to use different coloured pens to highlight particular things in your notes, for example key points or quotes. This could be fiddly to keep up during lectures, however!

6.3 Highlighting

Many people use highlighting pens to mark key passages in written texts. This is similar to the use of coloured pens to highlight key points but a few notes of caution are worth mentioning:

- there can be a tendency to overdo such text highlighting, making it difficult to distinguish the really key points

- the purposes of note making will differ and with them the points worthy of note: highlighting in a text makes it very difficult to re-visit the text for a different purpose, since your eyes will be drawn to such markings
- you should NEVER highlight text (or indeed make any other marks) in a book which is not your own

6.4 Abbreviations, code and shorthand

It may be helpful to get into the habit of abbreviating certain words which appear regularly in your lectures and readings. These may be specialised words related to the subject or simply common words for which you have worked out your own abbreviations.

eg Psychologists have a symbol which represents the word 'psychology'.



If nothing equivalent exists for your subject you could use your own abbreviation such as 'Geog' or just 'G' for geography, or 'SP' for social policy.

eg Examples of abbreviations of common words include:

assoc=associated (but may also be association - be careful!)
 ctrl=control
 infl=influence (but maybe also inflation - be careful!)
 pc=politically correct
 soc=social
 socy=society

Get to know also as many as possible of the normally accepted standard abbreviations such as:

eg = for example
 ie = that is
 nb = note
 w/ = with
 # = number
 w/in = within
 w/o = without
 x = times
 > = greater than
 < = less than
 k = thousand
 c = about, roughly
 cf = compare



Look at the following abbreviated notes and see if you can interpret the full meaning. Write the meaning below the abbreviated notes.

1 Diam Earth = 4X> moon
Meaning =

2 Lead Florida Bush>Gore <1k
Meaning =

3 Pop. Pomp 1991 census c. 176k c.f. Soton 210k
Meaning =



Remember - your notes have to make sense to you - but ONLY to you!

7 Final exercise



Note down the key points made in this workbook, in whatever style suits you best:

Key skills

This material will help you to develop your key skills in:

- *communication 3.2* - make a presentation about a complex subject, using an image to illustrate complex points.

and will help consolidate your key skills in:

- *communication 3.3* - reading and synthesising information from two extended documents about a complex subject.

Reference list

Bateman, M. (1974). Portsmouth: growth pole of the South East. In JB Bradbeer (Ed.), *Portsmouth Geographical Essays* (pp.42-58). Portsmouth: Portsmouth Polytechnic Geography Department.

Buzan, T. (1995). *Use your head* (4th Edition). London: BBC books.

Appendix 1

Reasons for note making

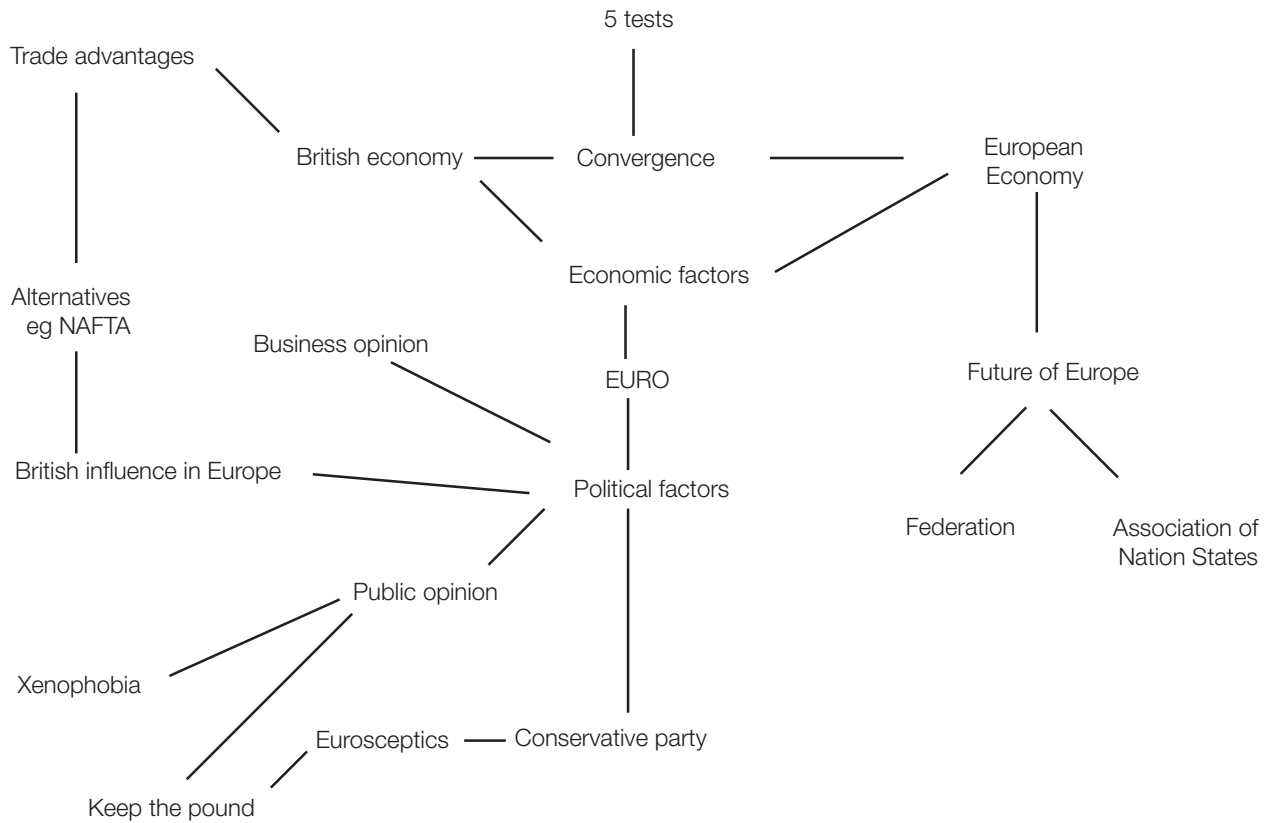
- to have a personal record of material
- to aid understanding of material
- to identify key points
- to help you remember what was said/what you read
- to record pointers for further work eg references
- to remind you of things to do

Appendix two

Examples of different methods of note making

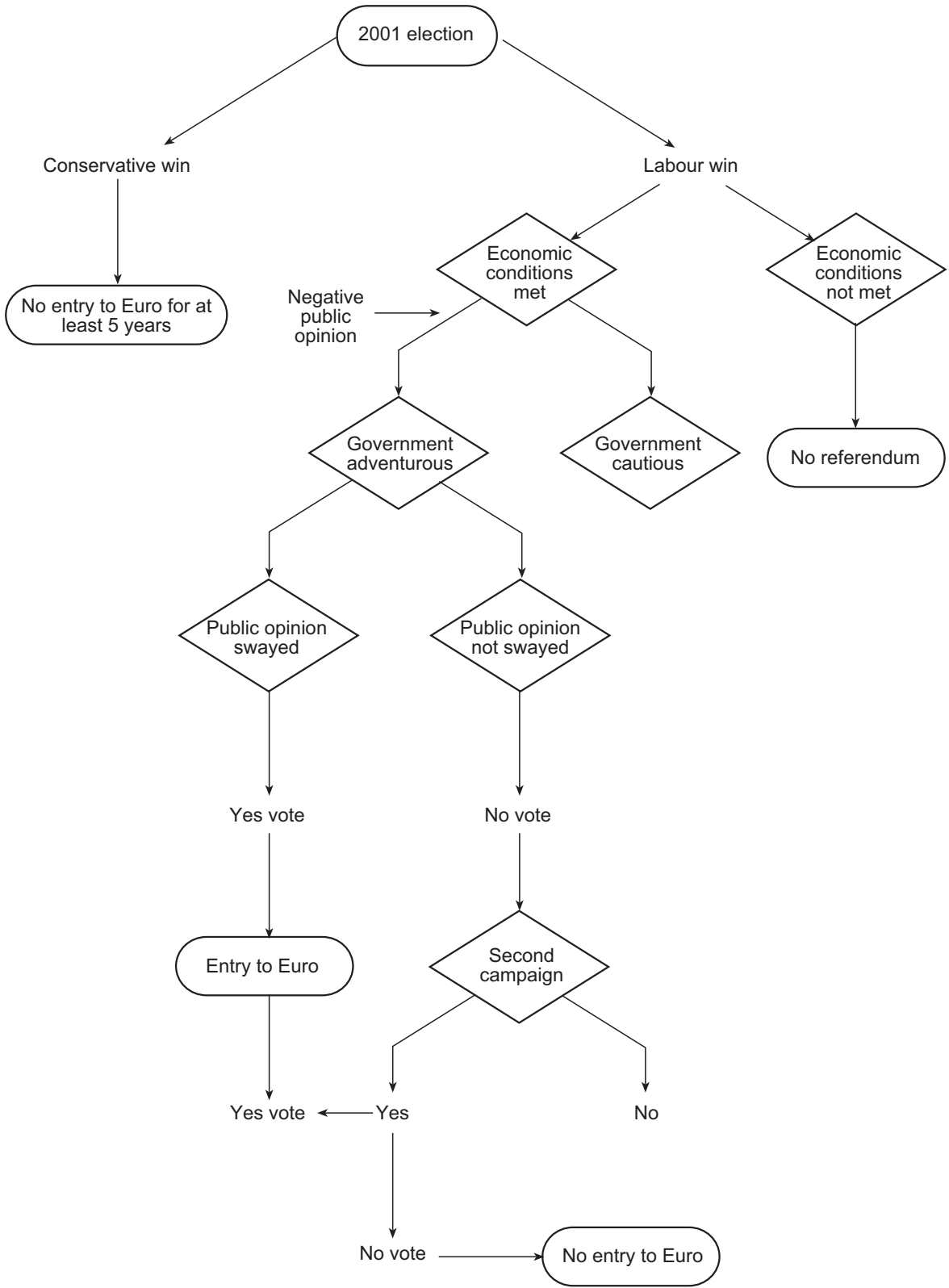
eg Patterned notes (Buzan diagram)

Britain and the Euro 2001



eg Flow chart

Britain and the Euro 2001





Britain and the Euro 2001

UK economic	<u>Labour Government</u> Five tests	<u>Conservative Government</u> No entry before 2001	<u>General issues</u>
UK political	Cabinet Division Chancellor/Treasury cautions Referendum commitment UK at centre of Europe	Major divisions in party Euro sceptics dominate Politically volatile	Public opinion against Business divided Loss of sovereignty/ constitutional issues
Euro political	Want to be part of long term European agenda	Alternative agendas eg NAFTA Renegotiation Leave EU	Alternative futures Federalism Loose association Enlargement
Euro economic			Performance of Euro Make up and size of Euro



Britain and the Euro 2001

1. Economic factors
 - Convergence
 - The five tests
 - Likely impact on British economy
 - Impact of performance of Euro
 - Implications of delay of not joining

2. Political factors
 - The future of Europe
 - Views of incoming Labour Government
 - Public opinion
 - Can a referendum be won?
 - Effect on Conservative Party
 - before and during referendum
 - after referendum
 - European political context

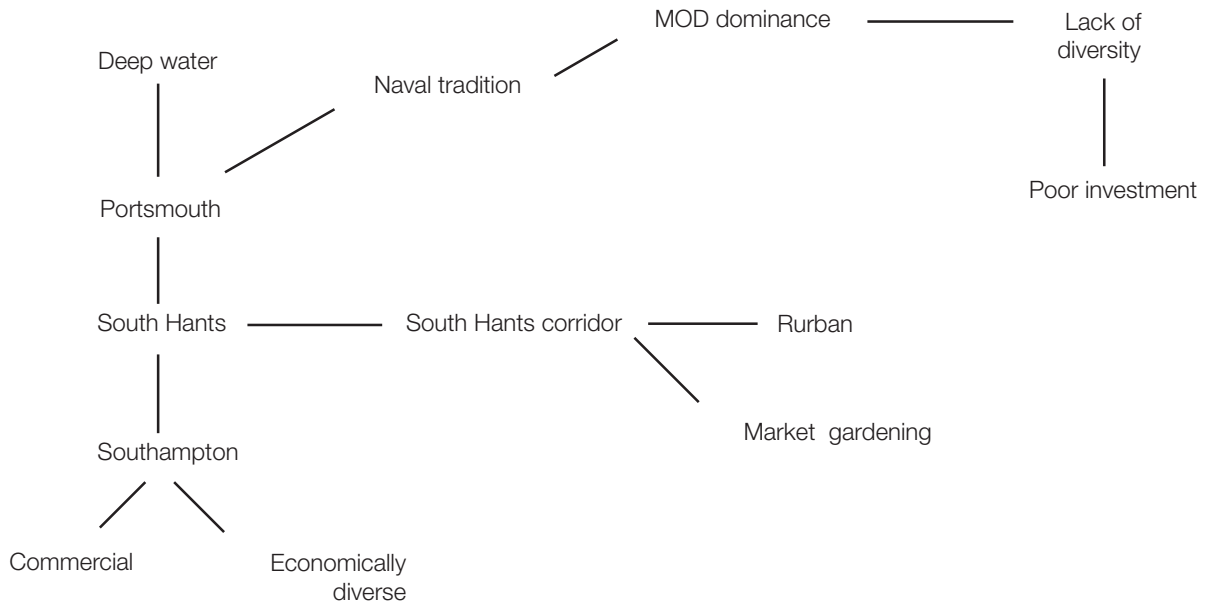
3. Possible scenarios
 - early referendum
 - delayed referendum
 - indefinite delay

Appendix three

Examples of different methods of note making

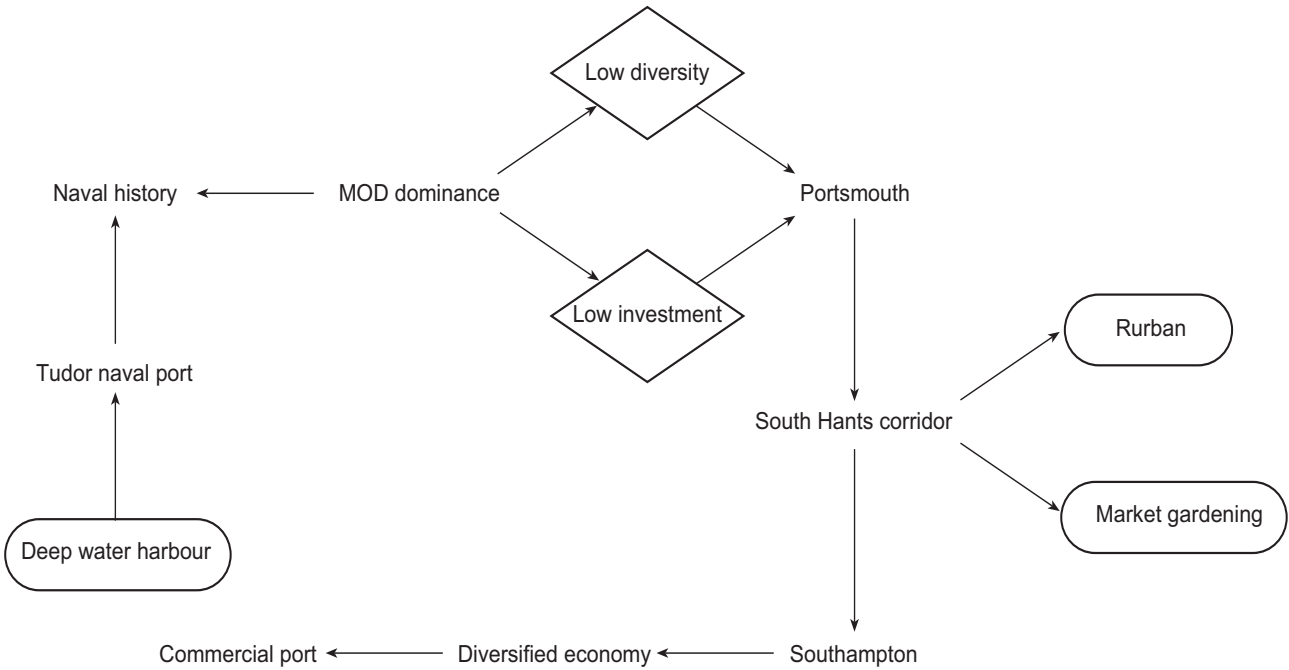
eg Patterned notes (Buzan diagram)

Paragraph on Portsmouth and Southampton



eg Flow diagram

Paragraph on Portsmouth and Southampton





Paragraph on Portsmouth and Southampton

	Portsmouth	Southampton	S. Hants corridor
Past	Deep water Naval Historic	Commercial	
Economy	MOD dominated Poor investment Low diversity	Diversified	Rurban Market gardening

