**TLC PODCASTS: Making notes from your reading**

Considering all the time and effort you put into your reading, it is important to be sure that you produce notes that are helpful later when you reflect on other readings to get a broader perspective on the literature. This hand-out captures the key points of Monday’s podcast on making effective notes from your readings.

**Making useful notes**

* Because you’ll be exploring so many texts during your studies, notes are crucial to understanding and remembering why a given text is useful for you. Don’t underestimate how much writing is involved in “reading”. In an hour of examining a text, you’ll likely spend up to 30 minutes writing!
* Take many breaks! After each small section of text you choose to read, take time to think about what that section means in the context of everything you found in the preliminary stages of reading. Refer back to the notes you wrote in the preparation, scanning, and skimming stages. As you make note, try not to lose sight of why you are reading the text in the first place.
* Make notes about what you understand, AND what you don’t understand. Write questions to raise in reading seminars.
* Margin notes and highlighting in the text is fine – but cannot replace your own writing and reflection accomplished in separate reading notes.
* Beware of copying readings, word for word (or almost), as part of your notes. If you can’t put an idea into your own words, you probably haven’t understood it yet.
* Hone your information management skills. Find a system to keep track of the bibliographic information (author, publisher and publication date, page numbers, etc.) together with the author’s main arguments and your ideas, and questions related to each text that you consider. A clear, complete, easy-to-use system will help you find material to write essays and literature reviews, avoid plagiarism, and revise for exams.

**Using time wisely**

* Schedule time once every week or two to review your reading notes. Ideally, your notes will be concise, since you aim to capture the key points from each reading. They should also be clear and easy to read, on a separate sheet of paper or electronic document, so that you can look at a notes for a few different readings easily. (This is much more difficult when all your notes are in the margins of the text.), so they will be concise. Keeping clear and concise notes makes regular reviews much easier.
* Consider incorporating your reading notes in your reference management tool (e.g. Mendeley, EndNote) or your own database or organisation system. Some information management tools offer the possibility of tagging texts with key words and creating searchable notes.
* Take stock of your note-making skills throughout the academic year. As you gain more experience in reading academic texts, you will also develop your own ways of making notes. Find a system that works for you. Remember that the work that you put into making notes and asking questions of your readings early in the year produces the tools that you will use later on for essays, your dissertation, and exam revision.