Note-taking strategies

Keep it relevant
Only take notes on ideas that are relevant to your question. When reading and taking notes, always keep your argument/question in mind. The strategy is to transform ideas from your sources into a form that you can use to construct your argument and answer your question.

Using your own words
Create a distance between you and the page of text you are reading. Avoid highlighting or underlining. This may create a colourful page and speed up the reading process, but it is false economy. Highlighting key definitions, for example, does little to assist you in deciding how that definition is relevant to your question. It is better to take notes by deciding on the key ideas of the passage and putting these down in your own words.

Using dictionaries
Use specialist dictionaries; transform definitions into issues around which you develop your argument. Extract from the definition the key concepts or ideas and put these in your own words. While dictionaries are useful starting points, ensure that it is acceptable to cite them. Specialist dictionaries are recommended in this, but general encyclopedias and Wikipedia are not recommended for citation purposes. Your arguments around key issues will form the structure of your argument.

Vary your resources
Use a range of resources. You will find a much greater depth of analysis, and therefore more reward from your marker, comes from pulling together the ideas of a range of sources. It is often helpful to develop a note-taking template or proforma: for each resource, use the following titles to identify some important elements:

- argument
- evidence
- examples
- key terms.

As you summarise these, include page numbers so you can refer back to them later. There are at least two levels of note-taking: transforming relevant ideas from one source, and comparing and contrasting ideas from multiple sources.

Reference your sources
Warning: write down the full reference as you take notes. This saves a great deal of time at the end when you are
completing your references list.

**Listening to lectures**

Recognising lecture structure - and the explicit signals to the listener - is important when note-taking from lectures. 'Using English for Academic Purposes: a guide for students in higher education' (available at: http://www.uefap.com/listen/listfram.htm) provides a guide to listening comprehension and note-taking, including online exercises.