Developing notemaking strategies: a case study

This is a case study of how one student studying for a BSc in biomedical science and management developed his notemaking strategies. (2011)

I was really worried about coping with lectures when I started in the first year. My concern was that my handwriting is so slow and messy. One of my teachers at my school told me that being dyslexic, I would really benefit from learning to touch type, so I used a programme called "Mavis Beacon" which I got form the library. The summer before starting at uni, I practised with the software and learnt to touch type. I am really pleased I did this. Before the lecture I look at the lecture title and open a Word file on my lap top. In this I write up all the questions I hope the lecture will answer for me. Depending on how much time, I also make brief notes on the topic of the lecture. I am almost certain that I would not do this if it were not for the fact that I can now touch type. In the lecture itself I sit at the back of the lecture theatre with my lap top. I open the same word file that that I created earlier and then take typed notes.. The advantages of this is that because I can now type really fast I get a lot of information down. The disadvantage is that I have to sit at the back as I do not want to disturb others with the sound of the keyboard clicking and I also need be close to the power socket if I want to avoid using the battery which does not last that long on my old lap top. For the advantages definitely outweigh the disadvantages and it is worth it for me. I used to type too much in my notes. Now I use abbreviations in my typed notes. When I get home I then look at the notes once again. I correct the typing mistakes. I also put in headings and format the text by putting in numbered bullet points and using the highlight feature in word. One thing that I have found really helpful is to think what is the question that the lecturer is giving us an answer to. So, for instance if the lecturer is saying that there six causes of hypertension, he is giving me the answer to the question "what are the causes of hypertension". When I can I then put in the questions. I have found this a great way to revise. I copy and past the text to power points slides, with the question on one side and the answers on another. Before my exams last year, I printed the slides in the powerpoint handout format and use these as a revision aid. The other thing that I have found really helpful is to convert some of my own notes, lecture handouts and chapter summaries in the course text books into mindmaps or so- called pattern notes. These are great. I like the way I can summarise so much information onto one page and I find it makes it easier for me to remember the information. I created a whole series mindmaps using the programme called freemind which is a free mindmapping software. Last summer I bought myself mindmanager which I think is better that freemind and costs about £60 for students. Not everyone will like mindmaps, but I would suggest all students give them a go to find out if they find them helpful.