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Notes Taking: Researching the Art

Nirali Ravaliya

Research Scholar,

Dept. of English, Bhakta Kavi Narsinh Mehta University, Junagadh

Writing a thesis is like offering retirement planning counsel to a 65-year-old: you can't start with a blank sheet and you'll be in trouble from the first. Ahrens does not hold back in How to Take Smart Notes when it comes to making big statements and his critique of academic writing guides is unrestrained. It is important to take notes before beginning to write an academic paper, even if the author does not give precise direction on how to construct a strong research topic, how to arrange a lengthier piece, or how correctly reference sources. As a result, Ahrens' book doesn't fit into either category: broad advice or particular instruction. Rather, it sits somewhere in between. Either a practical how-to guide or a psychological self-help guide that offers suggestions on how to deal with the mental challenges of finishing a piece of writing without incurring emotional breakdowns. "Writing" is the real medium through which all of this activity takes place, according to Ahrens's persuasive meta-reflection (p. 2), and the following is an excerpt from that argument: Writing, in his view, is linked to analytical thinking and the generation of new information. When it comes to the quality of academic writing, Ahrens believes that the amount of effort done in writing (in the form of note taking) prior to deciding on a paper topic is more important than anything else (p. 3). Theoretical physicist Richard Feynman and German sociologist NiklasLuhmann, both of whom specialise in theoretical physics, argue that it is impossible to think rationally without writing (p. 32). For its emphasis on writing as a learning and research tool, it contributes significantly to the current literature on the subject. Writing-to-learn tactics, for example, have been shown to be beneficial in scientific classes, and they may be used in a number of situations (Gunel et al, 2007).

First, we'll look at "smart note-taking." as a concept and the tools that go along with it. The "smart note-taking." approaches are explained in the second section. Note-taking as a precondition for good writing begins with Ahrens describing Luhmann's slip box technique, which he learnt from the prolific NiklasLuhmann, who published around 60 highly significant books and innumerable papers in his 30-year career. In the end, Luhmann would take a piece of paper and write down some notes, with the bibliographic information on one side and a synopsis of the book's content on the other. The bibliographic slip box is the final resting place for these comments. Following this first phase, Luhmann went back and reviewed his notes to see whether any of them were relevant to his own work at the time of writing. Yet only after completing this second step did Luhmann return to his primary slip box and jot down notes on another piece of paper before linking his new notes with those that were already there in order to insert them into the slip box. By linking thoughts and ideas together in this way, he was able to build a foundation for his later work, which included developing arguments and writings that were more fully formed and eloquent. For the final purpose, an index would serve as a starting point for a certain subject matter that had been noticed. While Luhmann used real pieces of paper, according to Ahrens, today's technology provides for more effective administration of a slip box, with free web programmes for storing bibliographic notes and the slip box method itself. Handwritten notes may be good for long-term knowledge, but Ahrens also emphasises the advantages of using digital reference systems such as Zetero and an online slipbox to save notes. Ahrens proposes that the first category of notes in Luhmann's first category of notes be written by hand for the purpose of simplicity and to guarantee that an idea is properly understood (the bibliographic). For mobility and cross-referencing, Ahrens recommends digital tools like Daniel Lüdecke'sZettelkasten (p. 31).

The second section of How to Take Smart Notes explains in great detail how the slip box works, drawing on a wide range of disciplines, from educational science to philosophy and psychology to social sciences and neuroscience to technology studies. It's a great resource for teachers and students alike. There are two parts to this section of How to Take Smart Notes. There are many more uses for the slip box, as noted by Ahrens, in addition to serving as an archive and database for Luhmann's writings (p. 20). As an alternative, consider it a collection of thoughts that have been made public. Subjects, questions, and arguments will

spontaneously emerge from the material, according to Ahrens, if the researcher focuses on what interests him or her and keeps a written record of his or her own intellectual progress. For Luhmann's system, it is vital to stress that it is built from the ground up, rather than following a preset sequence of topics. To put it another way, it acts as a kind of external framework for thinking. Ahrens, a neuroscientist, outlines how a slip box can compensate for the human brain's cognitive shortcomings, such as forgetfulness, subjectivity, and selective perception (Levy, 2011, p. 270). The use of written notes as a metaphor and practical tool for learning, writing, and research also acts as a practical tool for research. According to Ahrens (2004), the slip box's internal connections work similarly to Gadamer's hermeneutic circle: Preconceptions are inherent in all intellectual endeavours, yet they can be rethought and used as a starting point for future investigation. It is absurd to teach the hermeneutic circle at colleges while treating academic writing as if it were to begin with a blank sheet and go in a predefined straight line, as itit were to start from scratch," Ahrens writes.

Finally, the author promises to give "six steps to a successful writing career." in the book's concluding section. However, the proposed procedures sound more like a disquisition on human cognition and the psychological undercurrents of (academic) learning and writing, rather than a collection of "how-to" suggestions. When it comes to note-taking and thinking, Ahrens advocates a non-linear strategy that stimulates the development of new ideas rather than creating preconceptions. Unpredictability is anything that cannot be overcome or managed by following a set of regular processes, according to Ahrens. As a result, he emphasises that writing, which he regards to be a synonym for thinking, must be open-ended in order to produce really original findings. Writing in higher education is vital, and Ahrens discusses this in light of this. As the author reiterates his central claim that writing is the primary channel of thinking, he points out that, if done properly, studying may truly be considered independent research, like writing a final thesis (p. 35).

The sliding box's design is uncomplicated. For many authors who want to take full use of the medium's potential, however, it will require a major adjustment in their daily habits. If you've ever taken notes while reading a piece of writing and then tried to put them all together to produce an essay, you'll know how difficult it can be. It may be useful to reconsider old habits and use systematic note-taking to think and write in its own right, even while Ahrens

acknowledges a number of genuine problems. Authors will find detailed instructions on how to take smart notes, build a Luhmann-style slip box, and apply this advice into their everyday routines in this book. Human processes of meaning construction and learning, as well as the generation of really unique knowledge are all carefully examined and stated by Ahrens. As a result, the slip box is made available to students as a teaching tool for long-term learning and an aid for writing (more) efficiently. For Ahrens, it is less about devising a new way of taking notes or arranging academic writing than presenting difficult concerns about the underlying nature of writing as a medium for knowledge generation. This is due to Luhmann's slip box approach being widely used.

As a philosopher of education and social scientist, Ahrens is well-versed in themes such as global disclosure, knowledge creation, and the production of knowledge (2014). When it comes to "improving writing," the book may advertise itself as a how-to manual, but in reality, the book reads more like an academic thesis than a how-to book. Both the practical advice and the underlying philosophy are presented in a way that is both humorous and anecdotal, making the book both accessible and compelling. In this meta-reflection on the importance of writing in and as thinking, this book is enthralling. As a result, Ahrens argues that the humanities are necessary and relevant today. It is sad that Ahrens fails to critically reflect on the alluring hazards of academic careerism for really innovative work, considering his emphasis on increasing personal productivity and 'raising' written output with Luhmann's slip box approach. Neoliberal universities, with their ever-increasing expectations for high productivity in short time frames, have developed a poisonous culture of research characterised by an ideology of 'publish or perish' (publish or perish) (Mountz et al. 2015). (Colquhoun, 2011). Open Science Initiative Working Group 2015 found that distorted publishing incentives in academia are already leading to a five-fold increase in the amount of research published every year (Miller, 2012); on the other hand, exaggerated expectations of academic prolificity run the risk of lowering the quality of science and demoralising those who are the victims of this type of management mismanagement (Colquhoun, 2011). Increasing governmentalization and commercialization of academic life are also directly linked to the proliferation of publication venues, according to Miller, 2015. So while Ahrens frequently points out that Luhmann's theory can help academics produce more written output,

he sadly fails to consider the same conditions of academic life that make a book like his own so desirable in the first place.

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