

UNDERSTANDING DIFFICULT TEXTS and MAKING NOTES FROM THEM

A WORD OF WARNING – never try to read a difficult text all in one go. It will simply not work for you.

Approach the task this way.

- Step 1** Before you begin reading, understand what the topic is about by reading the heading of the text, or thinking about the context in which you are reading it or what has gone before.
- Step 2** Assume each paragraph has a **main point** and, as you read, look for that main point. If the text is well written the main point should be in the first or topic sentence. What follows should then be supporting explanation and *examples or evidence*. Underline the main point and summarise it into a topic phrase in the margin.

The Kashmir Tinderbox, The New York Times, 28 June, 1998

Britain abandoned its empire and left India and Pakistan to fight over Kashmir

The conflict over Kashmir began with Britain's hasty retreat from empire, which left India and Pakistan to fight over its (Kashmir's) status. That fight has since become an emotional test of principle and identity. As India's only Muslim state, Jammu and Kashmir, as it is officially called, has been torn by an insurrection that has cost 20,000 lives in the last decade and pinned down a major portion of India's armed forces. This month, *guerillas seeking independence for the state have ambushed two weddings, leaving more than two dozen people dead, and blown up a train.*

- Step 3** Now write your notes in summary form using a headings and sub-headings structure you are comfortable with, or are developing, eg.

title The War in Kashmir

Main point ***Britain's hasty retreat from empire, left India and Pakistan to fight over its (Kashmir's) status.***

explanation *India's only Muslim state, an emotional test of principle and identity torn by an insurrection that has cost 20,000 lives*

examples *guerillas seeking independence have ambushed two weddings, leaving more than two dozen people dead, guerillas have blown up a train.*

- Step 4** This process can then be followed throughout the text and what you end up with is a summary of each paragraph in the margin.