

Taking notes is essential to being successful in your studies. Unless you have a photographic memory, you will not be able to remember every important piece of information that you come across.

Why do it?

- Keeping notes is a way of ensuring that you have a copy of any important information that you hear in a lecture, tutorial, or read in a book or study guide. Note-taking allows you to easily refer back to this information.
- Taking notes is a way for you to organise thoughts, formulate ideas and put your questions into words.
- Taking notes also makes it easier for many students to remember things.

When making study notes, first identify **what the notes are for**. Are they for learning information that you will later be examined on, or is it to collect information that you need for an assignment?

In lectures and tutorials

During a lecture, it is important to listen and take notes. Note-taking can:

- help you identify the main points of a presentation
- help you stay awake
- provide the basis for further research afterwards
- jog your memory when you revise and help you to recall the lecture content
- focus on examples the lecturer/tutor provides that help you to understand key concepts
- write down key words and phrases used by the lecturer/tutor

Do not just copy notes from the slides. Instead, focus on supplementary information that the lecturer/tutor adds to them that could be of use.

Focus on writing down key words and phrases and key information that you will need to remember later. Do not attempt to write down every single word the lecturer says.

Make sure that you are well-prepared before the lecture. Have some idea of what the topic is going to be and read up beforehand from any recommended texts.

For assessment tasks

Creating notes for assessment tasks is different from taking notes from lectures. The idea is to create a mini-library with important information that you come across while researching. This way you can easily find it to use when you start the task. A good way of taking notes for this purpose is by writing 'annotated bibliographies' for each key source. To do this, write down:

1. The full referencing information of the source (e.g., book; chapter of a book, journal article, video file).
2. A short summary (100-150 words) of the key information from this source.
3. A brief description (100-150 words) of how you will use this information in your work. Include specific information that you may want to quote or paraphrase. For example, if you are writing an essay on colour therapy, write a summary: 'Johnson's conclusion that birds are the most colourful animal ties in with using birds in colour therapy gardens'.

The notes you take as you research for assessment are not just for memory recall. You can use the notes to quickly find the source material. Do this to avoid the frustration of thinking, 'I know I read that somewhere ...', and having to re-read many articles and books to find it again.



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For learning & understanding

Creating notes for learning and understanding content, particularly when that is in preparation for exams, is a personal matter. If you are a visual learner, you might prefer to draw mind maps or concept maps (refer to *Related Helpsheets* below). If you are an auditory learner, making audio notes might be much more helpful.

An important thing to remember is that the notes are for **you**. It doesn't matter if they are messy or full of abbreviations as long as **you** understand them. Do not take notes for information that you are already familiar with. Focus on key concepts that you need to remember or investigate further.

Have you ever read a whole page and not remembered what you just read? Taking notes while reading will ensure that a 'memory trace' is retained. As soon as you come across information that is important and you will need to remember, note it down. This process will keep you alert, and you will have your notes to refer back to later when you want to revisit the content.

Using abbreviations & symbols

Taking detailed notes can be difficult during a lecture. Developing strategies with note-taking to become more efficient and effective will help you make connections between the ideas being presented, and reduce stress during exam time. The strategy of using abbreviations includes symbols which, like writing short-hand, require less time and energy.

Commonly used symbols

- = equals/is equal to/is the same as
- ≠ is not equal to/is not the same as
- ≡ is equivalent to
- ∴ therefore, thus, so
- ∵ because
- + and, more, plus
- > more than, greater than
- < less than
- less, minus
- gives, causes, leads to, results in,
- [] concentration

Commonly used abbreviations

- e.g. (for example)
- etc. (et cetera – and so on)
- no. (number)
- c.f. (confer)
- diff (different)
- NEC (necessary)

Related helpsheets

- Concept Maps
- Mind Maps
- Examination Strategies
- Structuring your Essay
- Annotated Bibliography



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