Note taking

Why are you taking notes?

To be take effective notes it is important to know why you are taking them, what is their purpose? It could be that you are taking notes to:

- prepare for a lecture
- write an assignment
- prepare for an exam
- prepare for a presentation.

The way you take notes will differ according to the reason why you are taking them but all note taking should be done actively.

Note taking in a lecture

Don’t rely on the lecturer’s handouts, they may be a handy tip, but using these is a passive activity and effective note taking means you being active. Start with a fresh page and write your own notes as the lecturer progresses.

**Listen** – what are the important points being said? Don’t try and take everything down, just the important points.

**Methods** – what method of note taking is most effective for the subject and for you, it could be:

- linear note taking, using headings and subheading
- diagrams, illustrations, flow-charts
- mind maps and visual notes

**Paper or laptop or tablet** – what you use is up to you, but if you are using a devise it is wise to turn of all distractions.

**Recording the lecture** – this may work for you, you can then listen and summarise in your own time. Most institutions would expect you to ask permission to record a live lecture, however, nowadays many lecturers are online which makes them easy to listen to over and over, and to make notes from.

After the lecture

It is best to revisit your notes as soon as possible after the lecture whilst the information is fresh in your mind. Use this time to tidy up notes and solidify the information. Tidying up notes is a good way to solidify the knowledge.

Talking about the subject, for many people, is a way of consolidating information and testing your understanding

File notes carefully, so they mean something to you when you need them.

Keep going back to them. Relooking at your notes is an excellent way to revise and test understanding.
Taking notes from reading.

Reading can be classed as a passive activity, most of us need to do something to help us remember information we have read. Below is a list of hints and tips:

- Quickly read a section of the text – don’t make notes on every sentence or read the whole thing before starting to write notes.
- Get an overview of the reading then go back and make notes about the relevant points.
- Use your own words. Using your own words shows you understand.
- Notes should be brief and selective
- Use capitals, abbreviations and underlining to make important words stand out.
- Space your notes out so they can be seen at a glance.
- Use colours, pictures, diagrams, highlighting.
- Use arrows and lines to show relationships between ideas.
- Write key words and not complete sentences

The Cornell method of note taking

Split a sheet of note paper into three sections:

1 **Note-taking section:**
   Use this largest section to write down the main ideas.

2 **Cue section:**
   Use the smaller cue section to jot down any questions you may have, or any thoughts on the subject.

3 **Summary section:**
   After you’ve finished taking notes, use this small space at the bottom of your page to summarize what you’ve written on the page in 2–4 sentences. Use your own words. This is the section that allows you to see if you understand the information.