

Note making summary

Introduction

Purpose

One of the most valuable skills you need to develop at university is the ability to make notes effectively. Good skills in taking and making notes will help you, as an active learner, to organise, categorise and recall information you can use when completing assignments or revising for exams. You can experiment with different strategies to find those which best suit your purpose and learning style.

Effective note making

Effective note makers

- Recognise main ideas
- Know what information is most relevant
- Have developed a system which works for them
- Can be brief and use visuals effectively

How to take notes

Many lecturers provide lecture notes, often in the form of PowerPoint slides. However, when this kind of support is not available, the notes you make are crucial. Listen carefully to the lecturer, as they will usually highlight key information. The common type of information you should note can include

- Main points
- Topic specific key words
- Definitions
- Main examples
- Formulae and calculations
- Areas of controversy

After the lecture, it is important to review your notes while they are still fresh in your mind. You might even rewrite your informal notes to create a series of formal lecture notes. This will help you remember the lectures and form the basis of your revision notes.

When taking notes from textbooks or journal articles, the same criteria apply, and you may also be looking at visual information like charts or graphs. You should also consider sections that could be cited in your assignment.

Note making strategies

Techniques

- Annotation – adding comments to a text, usually in the margin
- Diagrams – a visual form of note taking, useful for processes or cycles
- Paraphrasing – expressing the key ideas in your own words, important in understanding and remembering key information
- Summaries – a shorter overview of a longer text in your own words

Tools

In addition to the traditional tools such as pen and paper, a variety of technology applications are available, including tablets, smartphones, apps and digital recording

Issues

It is important to ask for permission if you are going to record a lecture. Lecturers may provide students with recordings of lectures and slides.

Abbreviations

Because note making is for your personal use, you can choose your own methods, but a common approach is using symbols or abbreviations for common words. Some examples are

Re – regarding

Vs – against

Et al. – and others

B4 – before

? – confusion/clarity needed

e.g. – example

Note layouts and organisation

- Linear – most common approach using space and lines to indicate relative importance of information
- Keyword tree – draw a tree with branches to indicate key ideas
- Mind map – a visual representation of relationships to a main idea, which is usually in the centre of the page, with secondary ideas leading off the main idea
- Networks – uses a slash pattern to organise ideas, common for pro/con arguments
- Herringbone – similar to a keyword tree but resembles the shape of a fish skeleton with the main idea as the head and secondary ideas leading off the skeleton
- Three column approach – uses the margins of a text on the left for the reader's comments and the margin on the right for more formal notes

Whatever methods you use, you need to be able to come back to them at a later date to revise, so they must be clear and consistent. You could create separate files or folders for each of your topics using paper or electronically. Ensure you label everything clearly.