

Note Taking in Lectures and Classes

Good notes are purposeful, logical, brief and accurate. They are your record of your understanding of the lecture and are used when preparing for exams or working on assignments.

Hints for note taking

Prepare beforehand

- Think about the topic of the lecture and what you know about it.
- Ask yourself questions such as, 'What do I know about the topic?' and 'How does it relate to what was covered last week?' This will open up connections to your long term memory.
- Read the PowerPoint slides before the lecture.
- Re-read your previous notes related to the topic and remind yourself of the content.
- If other reading has been set, do it.
- Arrive on time; the first ten minutes often contains an outline of the lecture.

In class time

Teachers use various strategies to indicate to students what is important. Being aware of these helps you identify the main ideas.

Introductions and conclusions

For example of an introduction: Today we'll be talking about the effect of information overload on the short-term memory. There are three main points ...

Beginnings and endings are vital. In the introduction, the lecturer outlines the important points, connects them with the previous and next lectures and puts the topic in context. The conclusion summarises the main points.

Repetition and elaboration

Important points are repeated or illustrated with examples.

Linking expressions

Listen for words and phrases that direct you to new and important ideas or show the relationships between the points being raised. Examples include:

- **Addition** words – also, too, in addition, furthermore, another.
- **Emphasis** words – importantly, specifically, especially, obviously.
- **Sequencing** words – firstly, secondly, next, finally.
- **Contrast** words – however, but, despite, on the other hand, conversely.
- **Concession** words – although, even though, in the light of, given that.
- **Illustration** words – for example, to illustrate, that is.
- **Reason and result** words – consequently, because, therefore, leads to.

Voice emphasis

In lectures and tutorials, important ideas, words and phrases are often emphasised. A lecturer or teacher may do this by saying them more slowly, more loudly, or by pausing. Gestures and movement may also be used for emphasis.

After the class

Revise notes within 24 hours of the class.

Commonly used abbreviations

Abbreviations can assist you to make notes quicker. You should discover commonly used abbreviations or develop your own for any frequently used vocabulary that is specific to the courses you are studying.

Cornell system of note taking

This system of note taking helps you to focus on the main ideas and to separate them from the details in a clear and efficient manner.

The following is an extract from the article Memory and Learning (RMIT Study and Learning Centre, 2009).

Long and short term memory

In order to develop effective academic skills, it is necessary to understand more about how the memory is structured, in particular the role of short-term memory and long-term memory. Short term memory is the part known as the conscious mind and is used for paying attention.



Long-term memory is where information is stored. There are many things that come into the short-term memory which are not transferred to the long-term memory, as you can see in Diagram 1. In fact, the brain is designed to forget between 50% and 75% of the information that is not transferred to the long-term memory within 24 hours. Therefore, the brain carefully selects what is stored in the long-term memory.

To make notes using the Cornell system;

- ✓ make two columns;
- ✓ write **key words** on the left, **details** on right;
- ✓ use point form; and
- ✓ include **bibliographic information** at the top of the page.

Study and Learning Centre. (2009). <i>Memory and learning</i> . RMIT.	
p. 1	
Structure of memory	Useful to understand memory
Short term	Short term = paying attention
Long term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- info transferred into LT memory“... the brain is designed to forget between 50% and 75% of the information that is not transferred to the long term memory within 24 hours.” (p.1)- info stored > brain selects

Occasionally, you might copy useful quotes. Take care to distinguish between your own words and any copied directly from the text. Indicate exactly what has been quoted by using quotation marks (repeating the page number or using a different colour may also be useful).

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