



Learning Resource Centres

Note Taking

Learning Resource Centres
Study Skills Series 2

When studying in the college or university environment, we learn from many different sources. These might include:

- Lectures
- Textbooks
- Handouts
- Discussion (both formal and informal)

Taking Notes from Lectures

Being able to bring information from all these sources together is an important skill and a valuable tool! Note taking, particularly from lectures is especially important. With other information sources you can usually refer back to the original, but at the end of a lecture only your memory and your notes remain.

There is no single best way of taking notes. It is important that you adopt a style with which you are comfortable. When taking notes from lectures, you need to be able to decide what is important enough and what is not. The following are a few suggestions as to what you may wish to include:

Opening and closing remarks of a lecture are particularly important. They set out the format of the lecture and introduce the subject as well as drawing conclusions by summarising the subjects that have been covered.

Note down any examples or references given by the lecturer.

Try not to fall into the trap of writing everything down 'parrot fashion'. Paraphrase where possible and use abbreviations.

Write down any questions/thoughts that occur to you as the lecture progresses.

Styles of Note taking

Conventional or **linear** notes are the most commonly used method.

Loose-leaf notebooks are suitable for this purpose as they allow for the insertion of your own research on the subject.

Layout can help and a possible approach is to divide the page into columns. Also, make use of the planned structure of most lectures, so you can set out notes in an organised fashion. Use headings, sub-headings, indentation and develop a consistent method of highlighting important points, such as underlining. Use a consistent pattern of abbreviation, so that it becomes a personal shorthand and cuts down on time.

Patterned or **diagrammatic** notes differ considerably from the conventional method of note taking. As their name suggests, 'patterned' notes begin in the centre of the page and radiate out, thus forming a pattern.

Patterned notes can be used in lectures. Their most useful property is their open-ended nature. Additional information can be added without disrupting the form of content, and their style eliminates problems of order and logic.

Patterned notes are quite a departure for students who are used to conventional note taking methods, but are a good example of a different method of note taking suited to many lectures.

Whatever your preferred style, all notes should include:

- Speaker's (author's) main ideas and important details.
- Any important references.
- Space for adding relevant examples or additional material you discover later.

And finally, some general principles when taking notes from lectures:

Prepare for lectures by looking over previous notes. Make use of any course handouts, it will make a difference to your reception of the lecture material.

When in doubt leave blank spaces and check later with colleagues. If necessary, use phonetic spelling until you find out the correct spelling of unusual words.

As soon as possible after the lecture review your notes, checking that you can read and understand them. Don not hesitate to follow up queries with colleagues or the lecturer.

N.B: The responsibility for taking notes lies solely with **you**, the student.