

## Note-Taking

### Why take notes?

Note-taking is part of the learning process and a skill all students need to master to have a useful and accurate account of lectures and readings. The key is to capture knowledge accurately in a way that is meaningful and pleasing to you.

### Note-taking

- enhances listening and concentration skills;
- provides a personal record of the lecture/reading;
- helps you understand and remember lecture/reading content;
- provides material for assignments and revision;
- identifies relevant material; and
- connects prior knowledge with new.

### Effective notes are

- accurate;
- brief;
- preferably in your own words;
- accurately referenced;
- relevant;
- organised;
- easy to read; and
- understandable.

### Taking notes in lectures

#### Before class

- Review previous lecture notes and check the topic for the next lecture.
- Do any recommended readings.
- Review what you may already know on the topic.

#### During class

- Sit where you are comfortable and where you are least distracted.
- Head notes with the date, topic and tutor's name. Number all pages, keep the topic in mind, and identify the introduction, main points and conclusion.
- Develop good listening skills and listen actively for all verbal cues (e.g., "There are two main reasons...") and non-verbal cues (e.g., facial expressions).
- Do not write down everything you hear.
- Develop a system that is pleasing to you and make use of colour, diagrams etc.

- Develop a system of abbreviations and legible handwriting.
- Leave space whenever you miss a point and go back later. Lots of white space is useful for either adding information during the lecture or when revising and doing further research.
- Link your notes to any handouts and suggested readings.

### After class

- Review lecture notes by filling in gaps and summarising in your own words. Revising your notes will check your understanding and also give you a better chance of putting the information into your long-term memory. Have a good filing system.

### Lecture notes should include

- relevant material on the whiteboard;
- all examples, formulas, definitions, quotations, references;
- white space for later additions and to fill in gaps; and
- any relevant student questions – and the answers.

### Note-taking layout methods

There are various ways of laying out notes. Use a method that suits you; this may mean incorporating a number of different styles. Make use of diagrams, colour, headings, sub-headings, numbers, and columns. Make notes in a way that is pleasing for you to use and understand. Leave plenty of white space so that your notes not only look more inviting, but also give you space to add anything you missed.

### Linear (lines of words)

The following explanation of the linear method is set out in the linear style.

1. This is a traditional format most of us are familiar with and is therefore easy to do and read. The words flow on the page from left to right, top to bottom.
2. This method makes use of
  - headings for main ideas;
  - subheadings for detail;
  - indentation;
  - bullet points and numbering;
  - key words; and
  - abbreviations.
3. Do not write down everything you hear, rather
  - summarise the tutor's main points;
  - watch for visual and verbal signposts; and

- leave space for missed information.
4. You may use a combination of bullet points and full sentences.

### Writing Sentences

When using this method, there is a need to write quickly and legibly. It is helpful to use abbreviations (e.g., imp., esp.). It is a time-consuming method, but the upside is that a lot of detail can be included.

### Mind maps (spidergrams), diagrams, pictures

This system gives you the freedom to connect ideas and knowledge in a creative way. It is especially useful for brainstorming, planning, revision, and summaries.

- Limit the number of words on a line.
- Be organised and do not clutter the map with excess information.
- Make use of colour, different fonts, and a variety of shapes.
- The main idea is usually in the centre, with key words interconnected by lines, arrows, and symbols.
- Templates may be hand drawn or examples downloaded off the internet.
- Use your imagination to create unique and personal mind maps that help you to remember information.

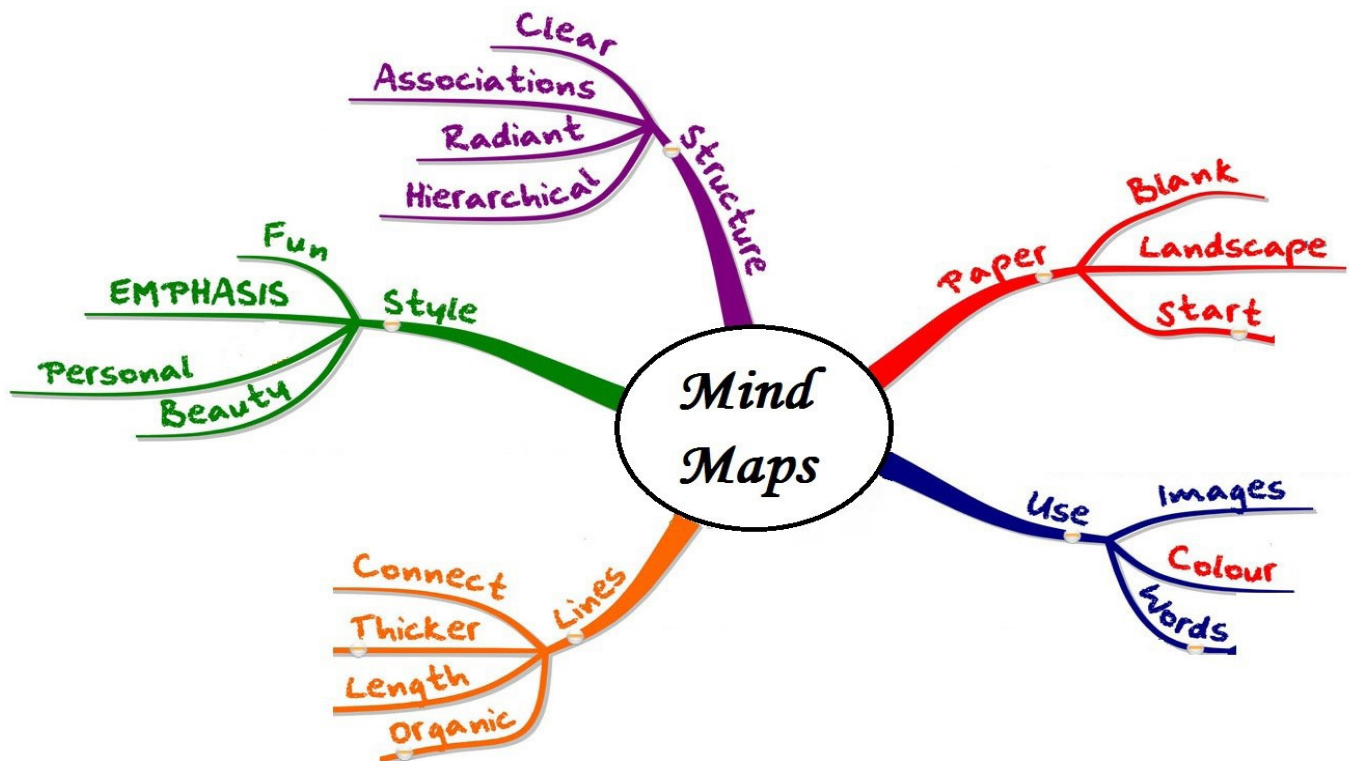


Figure 1. Example of a mind map (from "Infinite Minds," n.d.)

### Princeton (Charting) Method

This method is not so common for general note-taking purposes. It is a useful way of storing information in chronological order. Usually three columns are drawn across the page (you may need more), each with its own heading.

This method is also useful for making notes from readings. The first column is used for the heading and main points, and the second for the summary. The third column is useful for when you review your notes and add extra details, examples, and ideas that may occur to you later.

Headings, main points etc.	Summary of the notes	Blank column for use later when reviewing, examples etc.
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### Recording

For various reasons recording a lecture is not recommended and should only be used under special circumstances and with the knowledge of all those present:

- involves passive rather than active learning;
- no record of board work, non-verbal cues etc.; and
- privacy laws may be breached.

### Cornell Method

This popular and well-structured method requires the page to be divided into two columns. The left-hand column is usually used after class for summaries, reflection, and any extra information; 5 - 10cm seems to be an optimum width. The main right-hand column is used to record the lecture.

5-----10cm  Add extra information missed during class, review your notes, make summaries, and add your ideas, reflections, questions.	Record lecture here, in as much detail as you wish, and in your own style.
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## Making Notes from Readings

1. The same points apply to research notes as apply to taking notes in the classroom.  
However, when making notes from readings, it is imperative that, before you begin to make notes, you keep an accurate record of your references.
2. Your notes need to be
  - Accurate – do not change the author’s meaning.
  - Brief – copy down the main points only. Develop a system of abbreviations and symbols.
  - Relevant – be selective in your reading, seeking information relevant to the topic and avoiding lengthy examples and repetitions.
  - In your own words – paraphrase as much as possible. You will often use key words from the text, but do not copy down chunks of writing from the source. If you do copy down the exact words, use quotation marks to indicate a direct quotation.
3. Remember to
  - Record relevant references.
  - Date your notes.
  - Keep notes made from different sources in a separate folder.
  - File your notes carefully where they are readily accessible.

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