Note making

# Introduction

Note making is an important part of your academic studies. Developing an effective note making strategy will support you in everything from essay writing to revision and research.

In this resource we will take you through the different contexts in which you make notes and the different purposes of note making. We will then go on to look at some techniques which you can adopt to improve your note making!

# Context

There are several different contexts and purposes for making notes such as:

* **Reading:** When reading, you may also make notes on points you want to use or reference in future. However, because of the nature of taking notes while reading (and the different reasons for doing so) it can be difficult to use a single, clear and consistent style. Using several note making styles can lead to confusion when returning to older notes; you may find yourself spending unnecessary time re-reading notes to understand the key points.
* **Revision:** Revision is an important part of academic life. Making notes can help you better remember topics you have covered and clarify ideas and commit them to memory more effectively. If you have a good note making strategy already in place you will be able to make better connections between topics and further reading.
* **Lectures:** In lectures, there can be a tendency to try to write down everything your lecturer is saying. However, this is unrealistic and can cause stress as you may feel you are missing important information that will affect your understanding of the topic.

# Purpose

* **Understanding:** Effective note making can enhance your understanding of a subject by helping you to make connections between ideas and synthesise you’re reading.
* **Reflecting:** Note making after a practical learning experience (such as experiments, placements or observations) can help you capture what happened at the time, making it easier to write up in a learning journal or portfolio. Making notes after a lecture will also give you time to reflect on what you have learned and what you know.
* **Remembering:** You are often required to commit information to memory. Note making is an active technique that will assist you in the recall process.
* **Assignments and synthesising:** When you are note making in preparation for an assignment, you are bringing together all the information needed to complete your task. You may have made notes from a number of different sources including secondary reading, lectures and practical work. You will need to synthesise your notes and make connections in order to give the best answer to your assignment question. Well-made notes will give your work a good structure.

# Techniques and tools for note making

## Posters

Posters and infographics are ideal for remembering key details, facts and figures. They are good for creating quick overviews of a topic and work well for learning visually, taking in information in image form.

## Question matrix

The questioning matrix can help you stay focused on answering the question and avoid going off on irrelevant tangents. It can be used to organise your ideas into sections that can form the basis of paragraphs in an essay. Most questions combine asking you to do something with prompting you to use or refer to a source of information.

When filling out the questioning matrix, consider:

* What are you being asked to **investigate**?
* What are you being asked to **use**?
* What are you being asked to **do**?

You can also add a box to keep track of your references.

## Audio

Sometimes it can be difficult to write notes but audio recordings can help you capture your thoughts. You can use a mobile app such as audioBoom. Recording your own voice can be a method of capturing your notes quickly to revisit in the future. This method is particularly good for note making when reading. You can also listen to podcasts or recordings to hear explanations of theories and concepts.

## Linear notes

Linear notes use headers, sub-headers and bullet points to highlight details, condensing longhand notes into concise summaries. Headings and sub-headings become memorable prompts to encourage the recall of information, ideal for revision! Linear notes are good for sequential learning, enabling you to take a step-by-step approach.

## Mind maps

Mind maps and pattern notes allow you to see you topic as a whole, spreading out from the main idea into more detail.

Mind maps can be used to identify connections between ideas and details. Using colour coding can help to group themes together. It can also help you to integrate your information sources alongside the main ideas/concepts/theories that you are working on.

## Index cards

Index cards can be used to support your note making when reading and revising. Buy some 6 x 4 cards and use them to condense notes into an easily memorable format. Use your own words, abbreviations and colour coding. Index cards are good for memorising facts and using lots of examples to illustrate thoughts.

## Colour coding

Using colours in your note making can assist you in recalling information during exams and when synthesising ideas. Colour coding is good for learning visually.

## Timelines

Timelines can help you understand facts relating to the history and development of concepts and theories. Timelines are useful for sequential learning, where you need to get key facts into date order.

## Flash cards

Flash cards are a great way to test your knowledge. Create the flashcards to help you recall larger pieces of information. When you read a prompt you are unsure of, you will know that more revision is needed in this area.

## KWL

KWL stands for; know, want to know and learned. This strategy can be used for the purpose of checking your understanding of what you know and for revision. KWL can also be used to identify gaps in knowledge and learning. The document on the left is split into three columns: Know, Want To Know, and Learned.

1. In the **Know**column, write down everything you already know about a topic.
2. In the **Want to Know** column, write down everything you want to know or need to know about the topic of your upcoming exam. To help with this, think about what areas your lecturer has emphasised throughout the module or areas that you know you need to brush up on.
3. In the **Learned**column, record everything that you have learned about the topic when researching the questions or things you wanted to know in the **Want to Know**column.

## Cornell notes

Cornell notes can help you reflect on and refine your revision — which is particularly useful in identifying and memorising what is most important to the topic of your exam! Cornell notes have three sections: Details, Key Points, and Summary.

1. In the **Details**section, write down all the important bits of information you discover about a topic while researching and reading. This can include quotes, statistics, diagrams or paraphrased information.
2. In the **Key Points** section, write down all the questions and thoughts you have about the details of your reading. The thoughts and questions you record here will guide further revision on where you may want to focus next.
3. In the **Summary**section, **in your own words** write a summary of everything you have learned and recorded in the two other sections. Summarising a lot of information into a few sentences helps to really focus on what is important — this is a very useful revision strategy!