

Learning Through Note-taking

The point of taking notes is to learn your course content. Taking notes in class is only one part of the process: before class, do some study to prepare yourself; after class, revise your notes and learn from them. Take notes from course readings, too. It's up to you how you take your notes, but remember that you learn more when you devote time and mental effort to it, and you remember more when you study frequently.

Before Class

Preparing for a lecture makes it easier to focus, understand the content, and take good notes. Even spending a few minutes preparing for a class will help you understand the lecture better. Steps to try include:

Find out the **lecture topic**. Ask yourself what you know about this topic, and think about what the lecture might cover.

Skim **lecture slides** on AKO | LEARN if available. Highlight main topics and identify parts you want clarified in the lecture.

Revise your notes from the previous lecture. Get up to date with any relevant quizzes or activities.

Read or skim **recommended readings** on your AKO | LEARN page. Make some notes on how they relate to the lecture topic.

Set yourself questions that reflect the learning outcomes of your course or upcoming lecture. Bring these to the lecture.

Talk to a classmate about what the lecture might cover. Tell each other what you know and don't know about the topic.

During Class

Try to write as much as you can but not more than you need. It might be challenging to find that balance, but you will improve with time. Remember, if you watch lecture recordings instead of going in person, you should still take notes. Here are some things you can try:

How to stay focused while listening

- Focus on content, not the lecturer's style
- Think about what to note down next
- Ask yourself what you find useful or interesting to know from the lecture
- Disable notifications from your devices
- Choose a seat away from distracting neighbours
- Recognise when your mind wanders, including when you judge yourself or the lecture, and use note-taking to refocus
- For lecture recordings, consider how short breaks, playback speed and pausing/rewinding could help

What to write down

- Lecture aims and topics: use as headings
- Key info relevant to lecture aims or topics
- Answers to questions you set yourself
- Examples that help you understand
- Anything the lecturer emphasises or repeats
- If you don't need it, don't write it down

How to write it

- Use whatever method works for you: paper or digital, writing on slides or on a blank document, individual or collaborative
- Write in your own words where you can
- Use keywords, abbreviations and symbols instead of complete sentences
- Annotate slides, diagrams and equations to show what they mean
- Mark up your notes as you go:
 - = unclear
 - = important
 - = timestamp to revisit in recording

Don't worry!

- Nobody makes perfect notes in class
- If you miss something, you can check the lecture recording later or ask a classmate, the lecturer or a tutor
- It's normal not to understand everything during the lecture. The most important learning often happens later

After Class

Review and rework your notes within 24 hours to enhance understanding. After that, study regularly to boost recall and application of information. Memory fades quickly without regular repetition. Try some of these tips:

Organise and clarify your notes

- Add headings and colour-coding
- Highlight big ideas and rewrite them as complete statements
- Fill gaps using the recording or readings
- Put into your own words what you didn't manage to during the lecture
- Remove what's unnecessary

Transform your notes

- Summarise lecture topics in your own words
- Transfer information onto diagrams, mind maps, or other visual organisers
- Create flashcards for material you need to memorise
- Write mnemonics or stories to help you remember related pieces of information
- Create documents you can add to after each lecture, such as glossaries of key terms

Test yourself

- Use bite-sized quizzes or flashcards on a regular basis
- Write a summary of a topic or concept without looking at your notes
- Teach someone a topic or concept, or explain it out loud to yourself
- Write and answer your own questions or problems
- Use textbook questions, or reattempt problems worked through in class
- Try past exam questions

Don't just re-read your notes: it makes you think you know the content better than you do.
Active engagement helps you learn much more than passive review.

Taking Notes from Course Readings

It is just as important to take notes from required readings as it is in lectures. If you don't have time to read the whole text, taking notes can make your reading more efficient because you are focussed on the task of locating information that is most relevant to you. Get an overview of the text before you start reading, and figure out which parts are likely to be most important to you.

- Use lecture aims and topics to work out what you need to get from the text

- Set questions that help you find the information you need

- Only take notes that are relevant to your questions or needs

- Keep your reading notes in the same place as your lecture notes

- Build your notes from readings into your revision routines

Don't know where to start? Try these 5 things!

- ü Before your next class, write down **1 question** you want answered about that class's topic
- ü During class, make a note of **2 things** you found really interesting
- ü After class, highlight **3 things** you didn't understand and find out or work out what they mean
- ü Summarise a full page of notes into **4 bullet points**
- ü Put **5 things** from your notes onto flashcards and test yourself on them for **5 minutes** each day

Want more help?

Head to the Academic Skills Centre
AKO | LEARN page for more tips
on note-taking and study skills:

