

Note-taking

Taking notes helps you to get the most out of your lectures, tutorials, study guides, and course readings. A good note-taking technique will save you a lot of time later, when writing assignments or studying for your exam.

Note-taking in lectures

Why take notes?

- To help you remember what is said.
- To help you concentrate on what is being said.
- To assist you in understanding the subject and to succeed in your studies.
- To provide valuable details for writing essays and preparing for exams.
- To offer “hints” about what your lecturer considers to be the significant aspects of the course.

There are three stages of note taking: before, during, and after the lecture.

Before the Lecture

Read the set readings, texts, or study guide.

Preview the appropriate sections of the textbook or study guide for

- headings
- introduction
- key concepts (which may appear as margin notes)
- diagrams
- chapter summaries or concluding paragraphs
- note down the key topics or ideas you identify in your readings.

Mentally re-run the previous lecture.

Write down the date and title/topic of the lecture and note down the lecturer's name.

During the Lecture

Use **active listening**, which is characterised by:

- concentrating on what the person is saying
- listening for the main idea
- remaining focused and not tuning out when the message seems familiar
- consciously focusing on the sender's non-verbal communication
- trying to identify the relevance of the information to you
- being prepared to ask if you don't understand

Watch for cues, body language and verbal signposts such as slowing down or repeating something to emphasise a point. Watch for phrases such as:

“Let me illustrate by...” (an example)

“You don't need to know this for the exam, but...” (irrelevant detail)

“This term means...” (a definition or main point)

Work out how the lecturer uses **overheads** and **PowerPoint**. Don't just rely on them. Make sure you **add in more** from what is said.

Take clear, accurate notes

Two methods for taking notes in a lecture

Liner notes

Linear notes are arguably the most common method for taking notes. Notes are taken linearly, running down a page. They usually involve letters or numbers, headings and indented sub-headings or bullet points. Often abbreviations or truncated words are used to keep the information as brief as possible.

1. Main topic heading
Information about main heading

Sub-topic headings

- Point
- Point
- Point

2. Main topic heading
Information about main heading

Sub-topic headings

- Point
- Point
- Point

Pattern notes

Pattern notes are not linear and involve some kind of pattern such as a table, mind map (sometimes called a spidergram), or flow chart. Pattern notes can be visually appealing, easy to read, and can be useful when highlighting connections between ideas.

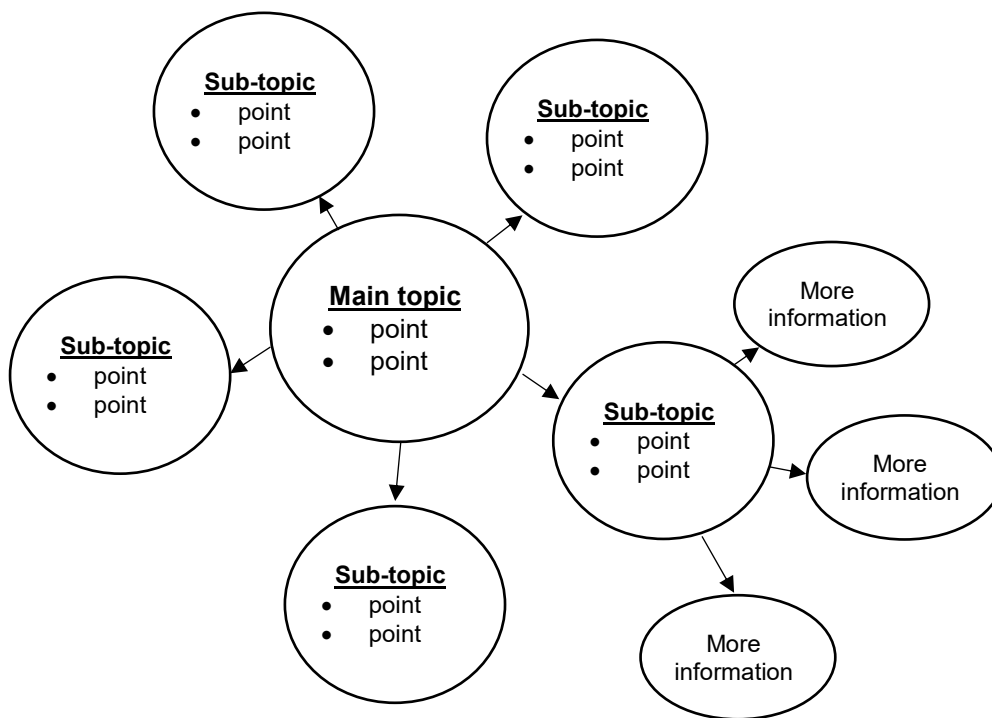
The Cornell Method for tabular note-taking

The Cornell Method is based on two columns: one containing the keyword or concept, and the other containing the description or notes associated with the keyword or concept. This method can be used while listening to the lecturer. In the right hand column, you can list the main ideas or write a paragraph and then on the left hand side note the keyword or concept that relates to your section of notes. At the bottom of the page you should write paragraphs summarising the information contained in the notes. Because this note-taking method identifies key concepts and also summarises main ideas, this can be a useful method for later revision.

Questions	Notes
Summary	

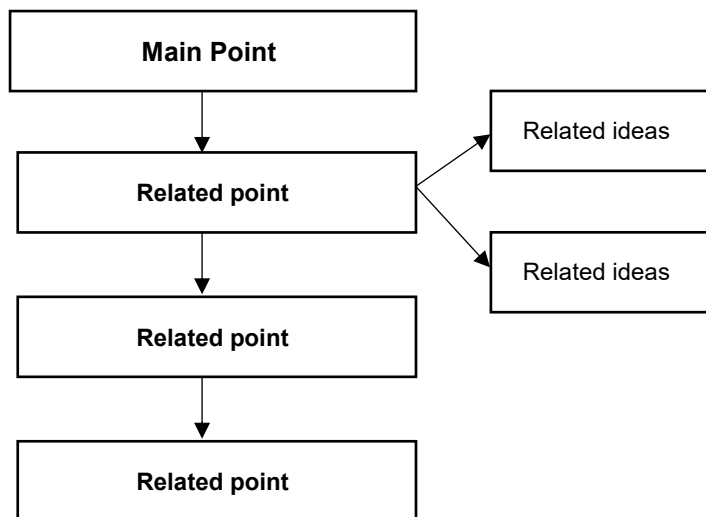
A mind map

A mind map is a diagram in which ideas, concepts, and images are linked together around a central concept, keyword, or idea. The sub-concepts may be organised into sub-groups or branches with more important concepts closer to the central core. This can be a useful note-taking method for visual learners.



A flow chart

Flow charts can be used to show steps or processes and can include related ideas for some steps.



After the Lecture

- **Read over** your notes as soon as possible.
- **Clarify** anything that you remember missing during the lecture.
- **Add notes** or examples from your readings.
- **Organise** your lecture notes.

Note-taking while reading

Overview

It is important to have a clear overview of what you are reading; it is recommended that you skim-read material first.

Know why you are reading. Is it:

- to get a broad understanding of a topic or theory?
- to find specific information on a set concept?
- to locate research on a topic?
- to find the reasons behind an idea or argument?
- to decide on the validity, truth or bias in a reading?

Read actively:

- Use in-depth reading techniques to read actively.
- Read with a pencil and mark and/or number main points, relevant details or examples or research.

Marking while reading

When reading you need a good system for marking your readings for:

- good descriptions
- definitions
- main ideas
- details and facts
- clear explanations

- examples

Four methods for marking readings:

Highlighting

Even if you are given a handout containing the main points of the lecture, it is important to record a short explanation in your own words that you will easily understand later; useful examples (both your own and others'); and any questions and issues that may arise. It may also be helpful to record your notes in the form of summary tables or diagrams (Manalo & Trafford, 2004, p. 44).

Underlining

Even if you are given a handout containing the main points of the lecture, it is important to record a short explanation in your own words that you will easily understand later; useful examples (both your own and others'); and any questions and issues that may arise. It may also be helpful to record your notes in the form of summary tables or diagrams (Manalo & Trafford, 2004, p. 44).

Numbering

Even if you are given a handout containing the main points of the lecture, it is important¹ to record a short² explanation in your own words that you will easily understand later;³ useful examples (both your own and others'); and any questions⁴ and issues that may arise. It may also be helpful to record⁵ your notes in the form of summary tables⁶ or diagrams (Manalo & Trafford, 2004, p. 44).

Margin notes

Margin notes involves making notes in the margins of texts. Generally, given the restricted space, margin notes are short and usually involve a key word or two. Here are some examples: will be in exam, Key definition, Results, c.f. (which means compare with) Jones & Smith.

From: Manalo, E., & Trafford, J. (2004). *Thinking to a thesis: A guide to graduate success at all levels*. Pearson Education New Zealand.

If you prefer, you can combine all four methods of marking: margin notes, underlining, numbering and highlighting. Using these methods together can make it easy to find facts, remember what you thought when you read the article/reading for the first time and even to compare different readings and the ideas of different authors.

Note: please don't mark any library books; instead, consider photocopying the chapter/s you need and mark the photocopies. This enables you to retain a copy for your study after returning the book. Note you may only copy 10% or one chapter of a book under New Zealand copyright law

Note-taking checklist – have you:

- written down all the referencing details?
- located the author's main ideas?
- shortened sentences to key words?
- put any direct quotes in your note-making with quotation marks (“ ”), and noted page numbers?

Academic writing and study skills support

1. Academic Q+A

If you have a quick question about study skills or academic writing, then they can ask it on the [Academic Q+A forum](#), which can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

2. Consultations

One-to-one consultations with learning advisors and writing consultants are [available online and on campus](#). Consultants can answer your questions about academic writing and study skills or give you feedback on your assignment's structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, presentation, use of sources, and referencing.

3. Online Writing and Learning Link (OWLL)

Develop your academic writing and study skills with the [Online Writing and Learning Link \(OWLL\)](#) from Massey University. OWLL includes information on assignment writing, assignment types, referencing, study skills, and exam skills.

4. Pre-reading Service

The [Pre-reading Service](#) is a free service, which gives students s an opportunity to send their draft assignment to [CLS consultants](#) for review and advice. Students receive individual written feedback on their assignment's structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, style, presentation, referencing, and use of sources. The service can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

5. Workshops

Free study seminars and workshops are run on campus and online. See [Workshops page on OWLL](#) for [programmes and registration details](#).