



Getting Organised

Top tips for note-taking

Note-taking is the skill of capturing what you hear, see, or learn in real time – the notes that you jot down in lectures, tutorials, labs, meetings, and so on. They are often, but not always, handwritten. Some students prefer to take notes electronically – on a laptop or tablet device for example – and some choose not to take notes at all, preferring to just watch and listen instead.

We recommend that you get into the habit of taking good notes in lectures and other learning environments as early as possible. Taking good notes can:

- Keep you focused – you need to listen actively and **concentrate** in order to take notes of value
- Help you to **remember** what took place (good notes act as a memory jog, reminding you of what was covered in a particular session)
- Help you to get and to stay **organised** – the notes that you take act as a first record of each new topic, and can be a ‘signpost’ for future study of the topic.

It’s important to distinguish between **note-taking** (jotting down notes as you see or hear new information) and **note-making** (a much more involved process that involves synthesising information from a range of sources, including your class notes). See our **top tips for note-making** for advice about the latter. Here are our **top tips for note-taking** in lectures and tutorials:

- If taking handwritten notes, buy a **pen or pencil** that you like to write with.
- There’s no need to use a different notebook for each module. A **single notebook** for all of your notes, that you can easily tear the pages from to put with related materials, is probably simpler.
- If taking electronic notes, **Microsoft OneNote** is a useful tool. You can install this software on up to five devices through your Office 365 account with NUI Galway.



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- Whether taking handwritten or electronic notes, ensure that you have a **system** in place for organising, storing and labelling your notes so that you can find them when you need to.
- Record the **date, module/subject and theme/topic** of the lecture or tutorial. It can be helpful to note the name of the lecturer, tutor or speaker, especially if these change regularly.
- There's **no need to write down everything** that you see, hear or do. Use your judgement to decide what needs to be noted, and what does not.
- If your lecturer provides slides in advance of class, you may wish to print these out and handwrite additional notes around them during the class. If you do this, print three slides per page, to leave room for your own notes. Most lecturers upload their slides to **Blackboard**.
- **Don't write sentences**; instead use phrases, keywords, abbreviations, ideas, main points, examples, and anything that strikes you as important, interesting or challenging.
- Use **colour or drawings** if they help you to stay focused or to remember.
- **Review your notes** as soon as you can after writing them. If you're in a study group, **compare your notes** with those of your classmates to make sure that you haven't missed anything.
- It's not advisable to copy and paste material from the internet as 'notes'. Doing so can result in unintentional plagiarism – see **NUI Galway's code of practice for dealing with plagiarism** (on the website) for more information about this 'academic offence'. If you must copy and paste, highlight the copied text, so that it can be put in quotation marks or paraphrased later. Keep a record of where the text came from, so that you can properly reference it when you need to. Find out more about plagiarism and referencing in the **Reading and research skills** and **Academic writing** sections of the Academic Skills Hub.

Supported by the NUI Galway Student Project Fund