



Note taking

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Introduction

Note taking is an active way to make a record of an event such as a class. This will increase your understanding and allow you to pick out the most important points and themes. This tutorial will get you thinking about:

- Why we take notes.
- The process used to make notes both in class and whilst reading.
- How to make notes using the Cornell Method.
- Top tips to apply to your own note taking.
- Tools used for making notes.

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Why take notes?

- To aid memory via active writing and active listening.
- To organise thinking, by noting key ideas and concepts.
- To provide a record of lectures, reading, meetings, etc.
- To follow up on action points or references.
- To consolidate ideas, make connections, help with revision, and to keep a copy.

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The note taking process

Note taking is a process and requires different approaches for different situations. It isn't just about what you do when you are in class or when you're reading. Successful note taking requires preparation beforehand and follow up activities afterwards.

Stages of note taking – in class

- **Before:** prepare by completing any reading and familiarise yourself with assignments required. If possible, get a copy of the class slides or handout.
- **During:** apply a technique (such as the Cornell method); note the session objectives, the summary and references, and keywords to follow up.
- **After:** follow up any references, organise and review notes.

Stages of note taking – when reading

- **Before:** think about the information you need. Do you require an overview, case studies, definitions, ideas or evidence? This will influence what you need to read and improve your motivation.
- **During:** Apply different techniques whilst reading. Scanning at first, then critical in-depth reading and annotating for key information.

- After: Make sure you keep a full note of the references for what you are reading. Organise, and review notes. This may lead to follow ups.

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Top tips for note taking

- Be concise – use bullet points and abbreviations.
- Paraphrase – this will help you to process the information. Paraphrasing is when you use your own words to express someone else’s ideas (written or spoken).
- Space material out so it is easier to understand.
- Use pictures and colours to increase memory and engagement.
- Try using the Cornell method – see the next section for more information.
- Annotate lecture slides if available - this helps you to focus on capturing your thoughts about the content.
- Afterwards read through your notes and fill in any gaps.
- Store your notes somewhere safe – consider keeping a copy in the cloud.
- Use the note taking process to help you make connections between information.

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The Cornell Method

The Cornell method of note taking requires splitting your page into two columns. On the left is a narrow cue column; on the right is your main note-taking column; and underneath both columns you write your summary.

- **Cue column** – After your class or reading, pick out the keywords from the further notes section and put them in this column. This will help you make links and organise your information.
- **Further notes** – During your class or reading, make notes in this column using the tips suggested and your own technique.
- **Summary** – Finally, cover the further notes and summarise the keywords (from the cue column) in this bottom section and reflect on the material identifying gaps and further reading.

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Try it yourself

Watch [this video about online filter bubbles](#) and try make notes of your own.

You may want to use the Cornell method for note taking. You can download the [Cornell method template](#) and use it to make your notes.

You can then look at an [example model answer](#).

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Tools for note taking

- [Google Drive](#) – A collaborative cloud-based app and online tool. Stores and synchronises across devices to enable collaboration on word process, spreadsheet and presentation functions.
- [Evernote](#) – An app and web-based tool for note taking, organising, making lists, and archiving. To compile formatted text, weblinks, images, voice memos and handwritten memos.
- [Google Keep](#) – Is another useful collaborative app to use across devices to save notes, photos and audio.

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Summary

You have reached the end of this resource. This information has been adapted from the [Note Taking tutorial](#).

See our other pre-entry tutorials: [Pre-entry Research Skills and Critical Thinking Tutorials](#).

Visit our FAQs: [Library FAQs](#)

Get in touch: library@sheffield.ac.uk

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References

301 Academic Skills Centre (2022) *Note taking*. Available at: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/academic-skills/study-skills-online/note-taking> (Accessed: 15 November 2022).

Cornell University: The Learning Strategies Center (n.d.) *The Cornell Note-taking System*. Available at: <https://lsc.cornell.edu/how-to-study/taking-notes/cornell-note-taking-system/> (Accessed 15 November 2022).

Cottrell, S. (2013) *The study skills handbook*. 4th edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Godfrey, J. (2014) *Reading and making notes*. 2nd edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pariser, E. (2011) *Beware online "filter bubbles"*. Available at: https://www.ted.com/talks/eli_pariser_beware_online_filter_bubbles (Accessed: 28 March 2018).

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Full URLs

Cornell method template:
<https://librarydevelopment.group.shef.ac.uk/Assets/pdfs/preentry/cornell-note-taking-template.pdf>

Example model answer using the Cornell method:
<https://librarydevelopment.group.shef.ac.uk/Assets/pdfs/preentry/cornell-method-example.pdf>

Note taking tutorial:
https://librarydevelopment.group.shef.ac.uk/preentry/note-taking/story_html5.html

Pre-entry tutorials: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/library/study/research-skills/preentry>

Library FAQs: <https://libraryhelp.shef.ac.uk/>

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