**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. Some students 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 more information about the latter.

Here are our **top tips for note-taking**:

* If taking handwritten notes, buy a **pen or pencil** that you like to write with.
* There’s no need to have a different notebook for each module, although some students prefer to do this. A **single notebook** for all of your notes, that you can easily tear the pages from to put with related learning 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.
* 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. Sometimes it is helpful to note the name or names of the lecturer, tutor or speaker, especially if these change regularly or if you want to follow up with them afterwards.
* 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.
* Remember that, in many cases, lecturers will provide copies of their lecture slides on **Blackboard**. If your lecturer provides slides in advance of class, some students find it helpful to print these out before class and handwrite additional notes around them. If you do this, ensure that you print three slides per page, to leave room for your own notes.
* **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, you might **compare your notes** with those of your classmates – just to make sure you haven’t missed anything important and to check your understanding of key concepts.
* Be very careful about copying and pasting material from the internet as ‘notes’. Doing so can result in unintentional plagiarism – see **NUI Galway’s code of practice for dealing with plagiarism** (available on the NUI Galway website) for more information about this ‘academic offence’.
* If you feel that you must copy and paste from the internet, a method that can help avoid plagiarism is to highlight any text copied word for word, so that it can be either put in quotation marks or paraphrased later. Text highlighted in this way should be annotated with the details of where the text came from, so that you can properly reference it when the time comes. You can find out more about plagiarism and referencing in the **Reading and research** and **Academic writing** sections of the online Academic Skills Hub.