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 you jot down in lectures, tutorials, labs, meetings, and so on. They are often, but not always, handwritten. Some students prefer to take digital notes – on a laptop or tablet for example – and some choose not to take notes at all, preferring to just watch and listen instead.

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 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 stay organised** – the notes you take in classes act as a first record of each new topic, and can be a 'signpost' for your future study of the topic

There is a difference between **note-taking** (jotting down notes as you encounter new information) and **note-making** (a more involved process that involves synthesising information from a range of sources, including your class notes).

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

- You can use a different notebook for each module, but a **single notebook** for all notes, from which you can easily tear the pages to put with related materials, is probably simpler

- If taking **digital notes**, [Microsoft OneNote](#) is a useful tool – you can install this software on up to five devices through your [Office 365](#) account with University of Galway

- Record the **date, module, and theme or topic** of the lecture or tutorial – and note the name of the lecturer, tutor or speaker, especially if these change regularly

- There's no need to write down everything you see, hear, or do – use your judgement to **decide what needs to be noted**, and what does not

- Most lecturers upload their lecture slides to **Canvas** before or after class

- If your lecturer provides slides in advance of class, you can print these out and **handwrite additional notes** around them during the class – 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, comparing them with those of your classmates or study group to make sure you haven't missed anything

- It's not advisable to copy and paste material from the internet as 'notes' – doing so can result in **plagiarism** if they find their way into a piece of your written work

- Find out more about plagiarism and referencing in the **Reading and research skills** and **Academic writing** sections of the Academic Skills Hub, and see University of Galway's [Academic Integrity Office webpage](#) for more information about academic misconduct

- If you feel you must copy and paste, highlight the copied text so it can be put in quotation marks or paraphrased later, and keep a record of where it came from for proper **referencing**

- Students may seek permission to **record lectures** or other teaching sessions

- Students who have been given permission to record on the grounds of disability do not need to seek such permission – more information on recording lectures is available in [this policy document](#)

- Whether taking handwritten or digital notes, ensure you put a system in place for **organising, storing, and labelling your notes**, so you can find them when you need them