

effective study skills

UNLOCK YOUR POTENTIAL



GERALDINE PRICE AND PAT MAIER

Effective study skills

Equipment	Options
Files	<p>Size: You need to decide whether you are going to combine a number of linked units or whether you prefer to keep a separate file for each unit. Postgraduate courses tend to be in greater depth, and this means that the volume of notes is greater.</p> <p>A4 files are the most common but may not hold sufficient information. Lever-arch files have greater capacity and are more robust.</p> <p>Colour: Some students buy different coloured files so that they can more easily locate information when under time-pressure.</p> <p>Notebooks: You may need to use this type of format if you are undertaking laboratory work or field work. Because notebooks are bound and do not contain loose sheets, they are excellent for sequential information but the disadvantage is that they lose the flexibility to insert additional information. However, part of course assessment may be the production of your notebooks as evidence. The decisions about size and colour also apply. Remember it is about accessibility of information in your busy lives.</p>
Paper	<p>Types: Lined, unlined, squared. Your choice will be highly individual. However, it may also be governed by the subject you are studying. For example, Mathematics students sometimes prefer squared because it is easier to manipulate worked examples. If you write linear notes, lined paper is better. If you prefer visual or mapping notes, unlined paper works best.</p> <p>Colour: Most students are very traditional and use white paper. However, you might like to experiment with other colours. Using cream or pastel colours can make information more accessible and prevent visual stress (which can cause headaches while reading). It is worth considering using two colours to differentiate summary sheets and the rest of your section notes.</p>
Section markers	These are vital pieces of equipment. They will speed up retrieval of information and accessibility if they contain a heading.
Post-it tape flags	These supplement section markers and enable you to decide upon important information which you need to get hold of quickly. They are moveable and come in different colours so that you can categorise information more effectively. When writing essays, you may find information you need dotted around your files, and these tags can save time in locating your required information.
Pens/pencils	Your choice of writing tool is very individual. However, employing different colours can be worth considering.
Marker pens	These will be needed when you review and consolidate your notes. Colour-coding information will help it to stand out for ease of access.

7 Labelling information: quick-start retrieval

If your notes are going to be used, then you need to get at the information. Often you do not have the luxury of time to go through notes meticulously to refresh your memory. Therefore, it is essential that you start out with systems to make retrieval smooth and efficient.

You will collect notes from different sources so you need to make sure that you label and file your information carefully. Apart from the notes which you make during lectures or when conducting your background reading, you will have handouts given to you in lectures and there will be electronic information available for you to download. In order that you are not overwhelmed with paper, it is worth spreading the workload.

Let us consider what is involved and when the organisation takes place: before the lecture or at the start of a unit (**Pre**) – at the beginning of a semester; in the middle of lectures (**during**) – during a lecture or as soon after it has finished as possible; or as part of your review and consolidation procedures (**post**).

Organisation Task	Pre	During	Post
Title on spine of the file	✓		
General List of Contents for each file		✓	
General List of Contents for each section		✓	
Each section should be clearly delineated and labelled	✓		
Each set of lecture notes should be dated, numbered, clearly titled and the lecturer's name recorded		✓	
Sub-headings should be clear and bold		✓	✓
Each page should be dated, numbered and have a reference. e.g. Unit 243:7:2 to signify unit code and the number of the lecture in that series and the number of the page of your notes for that lecture. This is important not only for quick access but also if you dropped your file and had to sort out the paper!		✓	✓
Summary sheet with bullet points for each section			✓
You may wish to combine lecture notes with other course notes. E.g. a hard copy of the electronic notes provided by your department; related journal articles; related general web information			✓

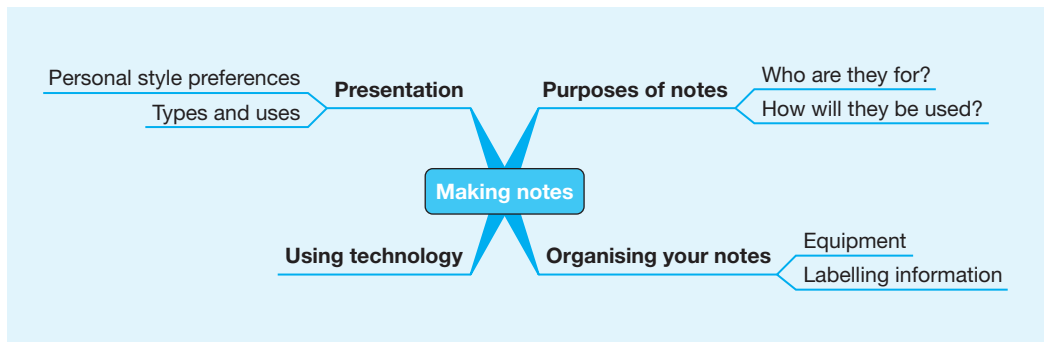
It is useful to keep your own notes, lecturer's handouts on the day, downloaded notes from a departmental intranet and other Internet notes you have downloaded on a topic all together in the same section. Remember if you have clearly titled your notes you will be able to differentiate your sources if you need to use the information for an essay or a project.

It cannot be stressed enough that putting a title on your notes and numbering the pages as you go will save you time in the long run.

8 On reflection

Your notes are a source which will help you to understand and remember factual information. Taking time to manage your notes systems will have an impact upon your studies. Well-organised files will facilitate retrieval of the valuable information for a variety of uses. However, the format of your notes should be moulded to your needs. Trying out different ways of presenting your notes may help you to interact and think about your subject which will, in the long run, make a difference to your grades.

Summary of this chapter



ACTIVITY 2 Update your personal development planner (PDP)

Now reflect on your current abilities and consider what you need to do to improve. You may want to transfer this information to your own institution's personal development planner scheme.

Effective Study Skills

Grade your confidence on a scale of 1–5 where 1 = poor and 5 = good.

My developing skills	Confidence level 1– 5	Plans to improve
I am aware of a wide range of note-making styles.		
I know the skills needed to make notes.		
I know how to match notes format with context/task.		

Date:_____

Getting extra help

Go to your Students Union to find out where to go for skill development.
Many universities and colleges have tutors who provide this service.

2.2 How to get the most out of lectures

If you have to take notes in a lecture, the pace, rate of delivery and framework for presenting the information are all out of your hands. The pressure is on to think on your feet, to try to make sense of the thinking which has gone on behind the scenes in the preparation of the lecture and to be able to record information at speed – in other words the ability to multi-task. Thus, it is vital that your listening skills and your note-making abilities are in tip-top condition to enable you to get the most out of lectures.

In this chapter you will:

1. assess your own interaction during lectures
2. explore the skills needed to get the most out of lectures
3. examine how to prepare for lectures to develop efficiency
4. develop keener listening skills.

USING THIS CHAPTER

If you want to dip into the sections	Page	If you want to try the activities	Page
1 Are you a lecture sponge?	102	1 Am I a lecture sponge?	103
2 The purpose of lectures	103	2 What do I do in lectures?	104
3 What skills are involved?	106	3 Should I use a laptop in lectures?	115
4 Lecture alerts: behind the scenes	111	4 Listening for key words	118
5 Template for note-taking	113	5 Recording lectures: myth or reality?	122
6 Using a laptop during lectures	114	6 Update your personal development planner	126
7 Critical listening: ways to increase your listening skills	116		
8 How to hone your listening skills: we hear what we want to hear	117		
9 Recording lectures	122		
10 On reflection	126		

Effective Study Skills

Estimate your current levels of confidence. At the end of the chapter you will have the chance to re-assess these levels where you can incorporate this into your personal development planner (PDP). Mark between 1 (poor) and 5 (good) for the following:

I know the skills needed to get the most out of lectures.	I know the different types and purposes of lectures.	I can listen effectively and differentiate the information I am listening to in lectures.

Date: _____

1 Are you a lecture sponge?

Lectures are a waste of time.

Angela, first-year student

A **sponge** learner is ready (or not so ready) to **soak up** information from tutors and lecturers. This sounds comfortable and relatively relaxing, but it is an ineffective way of learning. Did you know, for example, that if you listen to someone (for example, a lecturer), without actively making notes or participating in some other activity, you will be doing well to remember 20% of what's been said?

There are many reasons why some students do not get as much out of lectures as they should. Often this is because they have not prepared sufficiently and have inappropriate expectations of lectures.

What do you expect to get out of a lecture?

Pitching your expectations high is one of the ways you can yield good results. If you intend to interact with the information you will receive during lectures, you need to have the right mindset (see Activity 1).