

Alternative Format: Note-making Toolkit

Landing Page

Welcome and thank you for accessing this toolkit which has been designed to help support you with your academic skills development during your time at Edge Hill.

Accessibility

Our commitment to accessibility

As an Edge Hill student you are part of an incredibly diverse learning community. As part of our ongoing commitment to ensure an equitable and inclusive learning experience for all students, we have placed accessibility at the heart of UniSkills support, which enables all students to participate.

Alternative Formats

This is an alternative format for the Note-making toolkit.

Welcome from UniSkills

“Hello, we are the [Student Engagement team](#) – otherwise known as UniSkills! We are the people you’ll meet (in real life and online) through various support channels, as we help you develop your academic skills while studying at Edge Hill University. Later in the toolkit you will have the opportunity to explore our wider support, but this is your chance to [find out more about the team](#)”

[Access the video](#) to learn more about UniSkills and how to use this toolkit from your friendly Student Advisor. Alternatively, you are welcome to access the transcript as an accessible [Word](#) or a [PDF version](#).

How this toolkit can help

Note-making is a key academic skill at university and beyond. This toolkit breaks down what good notes actually look like, why they matter, and how to build a note-making system that works for you with practical techniques, smart tools, and tips you can use straight away.

[Access this short video](#), featuring one of your friendly Academic Skills Advisors, who will tell you more about why note-making is important. Alternatively, you are welcome to access the transcript as a [Word](#) or a [PDF version](#).

Upon completion of this toolkit, you will have developed the skills to:

1. Understand what note-making is, why it is important and when to do it
2. Make notes in different settings such as lectures and seminars, and while reading
3. Choose the right note-making format for you and develop your own note-making style

Completing this toolkit supports the following [graduate attributes](#):

1. Digital Proficiency
2. Adaptability/Flexibility
3. Critical Thinking

What are notes and why are they important?

Lectures and seminars throw a lot of information at you - some familiar, some new. Your notes are how you capture and make sense of it and turn it into something you can actually use later. There's no single 'right' way to take notes, but this toolkit will help you figure out what works for you and give you lots of practical ideas to get started.

Let's start by exploring what good notes are and why they are important.

Being prepared for making notes

When you attend your lectures and seminars, there is the expectation that you will come prepared to study and make notes. Below are some top tips to remember:

Bring a back-up plan

Even if you plan on taking notes on a device, it's worth having a pen and paper with you. Devices can lose power or plugs may not be available, and having a back-up means you won't miss out on any information you need to remember.

Don't forget to charge your device

The night before, charge your device so you are ready for the session. You may also want to bring your charger with you and charge up your device in breaks between sessions, if possible, to maintain the battery level.

Have Access to the slides

Many lecturers provide the slides in advance so you can have these available during the session.

Decide how to store your notes

Having the previous notes organised makes it easier to revisit them later. We'll cover this further later in this toolkit.

Many of these tips are just as useful when you're studying independently whether you're reading, researching or revising. We'll explore these in more detail later in the toolkit.

Why and when should you make notes?

Before we explore making notes in different settings and the techniques you could use, it is important you understand the purpose of notes and when you should be making them.

Why do you make notes?

Creating notes helps you make sense of the key information given in lectures and seminars. Instead of writing everything down, focus on the points that matter and put them into your own words. This makes it easier when you revisit your notes later and saves time because the key points are clear.

When should you make notes?

You will make notes at various points during your studies, for example in lectures, in seminars, while reading and while revising. For each, you should consider making notes at 3 key points:

- Before you learn
- During learning
- After learning

We'll cover these in more depth later in the toolkit.

Summary

Good notes should help you prepare in advance, understand now and revise later.

Activity: What should good notes contain?

For the statements below, decide which ones would be under the headings 'Good Notes' or 'Avoid'.

The answers can be found after the activity.

- Writing down verbatim what was said or discussed
- Devices that distract you from concentrating in class
- Personal Reflections – questions, follow-up reading, points to research further
- Disorganised notes that you can't follow or don't make sense after class
- Key information such as themes, theories, ideas, definitions, statistics, dates
- Trying to write everything down rather than capturing what is most important
- Passively copying lecture slides you have access to on learning edge
- A clear structure using headings, subtitles, bullet points, diagrams/mind maps
- Unclear references that you can't follow up afterwards

- Source details including author, title, date, key quotes/paraphrases
- Making a lot of notes which feel overwhelming when you revisit them
- Memory triggers – colour coding, highlighting, underlining, symbols
- A summary of the key points you have learned to consolidate learning

Answers

Here are the answers for the activity above:

Good notes:

- Personal Reflections – questions, follow-up reading, points to research further
- Key information such as themes, theories, ideas, definitions, statistics, dates
- A clear structure using headings, subtitles, bullet points, diagrams/mind maps
- Source details including author, title, date, key quotes/paraphrases
- Memory triggers – colour coding, highlighting, underlining, symbols
- A summary of the key points you have learned to consolidate learning

Avoid:

- Writing down verbatim what was said or discussed
- Devices that distract you from concentrating in class
- Disorganised notes that you can't follow or don't make sense after class
- Trying to write everything down rather than capturing what is most important
- Passively copying lecture slides you have access to on learning edge
- Unclear references that you can't follow up afterwards
- Making a lot of notes which feel overwhelming when you revisit them

Active engagement for note-making

Good notes come from actively focusing on the key ideas being shared. Rather than noting down everything word-for-word, aim to capture the main points in your own words so your notes are clearer and more useful later.

- Do some preparatory reading or research on the topic beforehand so you feel more confident engaging in class and can identify key points.
- Avoid any distractions such as your mobile phone so you can stay focused on the discussion and don't miss out on any key points in your notes.
- Pay attention to the different ways a lecturer may signal key ideas through spoken word or captions, slides, or how they organise the information for you. *Most importantly ...* highlights a key point. *In contrast ...* signals an alternate perspective. *Similarly ...* suggests something in common.
- Ask questions if you are unsure of anything. Chances are, there will be others in the room who are thinking the same thing.
- Discuss your notes with others - they may have picked up on other points you didn't and vice versa.

How to make notes

Notes can take many forms - digital or handwritten, bullet pointed or colour-coded. Let's explore the pros and cons of digital and handwritten notes, the different note-making styles you may use, and the techniques that can help you become a note-making pro.

Handwritten or digital: which is best for me?

Both handwritten and digital methods are useful when making notes, but which is better for you?

Activity: The pros and cons of handwritten notes

Let's start with handwritten notes. Explore the table below to discover the pros and cons of handwriting your notes.

Pros	Cons
Better retention: research consistently shows that handwritten notes lead to better retention	Slower: Many people find they are slower at writing than they are at typing. In a fast-paced

meaning you remember more information for future learning.	lecture, this could mean missing important information while focusing on noting down the previous point.
Flexibility and creativity: handwritten notes allow for the most flexibility to add in visual elements such as diagrams or indicate links between points using arrows for example.	Not searchable: To find information in your notes, you have to manually search each document to find what you are looking for.
Less distractions: you are less likely to be distracted by notifications, and this allows for a more focused approach to sessions.	Easy to lose: If you don't organise your notes after a session, they could be lost or damaged.
Increased brain activity: writing engages more cognitive approaches which allows for better concentration, clearer understanding and ultimately better retention.	Not easily editable: Written notes aren't easy to edit. If you make a mistake you have to either cross out or blank out the mistake and rewrite it correctly, and if you miss something out you have to squeeze it in the remaining space or link back with symbols/arrows.
	Note easy to share: to share your notes with someone else, you have to digitise them by scanning, taking a photo (and making sure it is clear enough to read!) or type them up.

Activity: The pros and cons of digital notes

Now let's move on to consider the pros and cons of digital notes.

Pros	Cons

<p>Searchable and organised: Digital notes are easy to organise (with the right naming conventions which we'll consider a little later) and you can search within documents for specific information saving you time when writing assignments or revising.</p>	<p>Distractions: Unlike handwritten notes, it is easy to get distracted by notifications, apps or social media so you may want to turn these off during sessions.</p>
<p>Integrate multimedia: While you may not be able to easily draw diagrams on your notes (depending on the software and device you use), you can integrate links, images, videos and audio, as well as diagrams drawn in other programs keeping everything you need in one place.</p>	<p>Technical issues: Digital notes can be lost too! Sometimes documents can corrupt which can be difficult to get back or a device suddenly restarting or losing power can mean any unsaved work is lost so save regularly or work in the cloud.</p>
<p>Available anywhere, anytime: Documents stored in the cloud (e.g. OneDrive) can be accessed and edited anywhere at any time with an internet connection. No more forgotten folders or notebooks!</p>	<p>Overwhelming: The sheer volume of apps and features can feel overwhelming or can detract from the note-making process.</p>
<p>Collaborative and shareable: With many services such as OneDrive, collaborative features are built in so sharing a document or collaborating in real time is easy.</p>	<p>Retention of information: While typing is quicker, you are less likely to retain as much of the information from typing notes over handwriting them.</p>
<p>Quick: Many people are now quicker at typing than writing so can capture information better digitally.</p>	<p>Less active process: Typing is a less active process and requires less cognitive function meaning you may be less engaged or less thought is evoked.</p>

Easy to correct: It is easy to correct or add in extra information in a digital document as the layout isn't fixed.

Poor wi-fi connection: a poor wi-fi connection can wreak havoc on your note-making! A patchy connection may stop your notes from syncing properly meaning updates from one device don't show up on another – or worse you could lose the changes altogether. If your connection drops during a sync, some apps may only save part of your work.

Note-making styles

Now you've considered both handwritten and digital notes, let's turn to the different styles you could use. Below are just 3 overarching approaches you could use, though many more exist and you may want to explore further to find which methods work best for you. While each style has its own strengths, you may decide to use a combination of styles to illustrate different information within the same document effectively.

Traditional linear notes

Linear notes involve using traditional note-making methods such as using headings, subheadings and bullet points following the order of the session or reading. This style of notes is easy to revisit alongside lecture slides as they will follow the same structure.

Pattern notes

If you like more visual notes, you may want to use a pattern note style like a mindmap, flowchart, or table for example. Using this style of notes can allow you to make connections between points, illustrate a process, or simply make something more memorable. You may not use this style independently of others - instead, you may use pattern notes to illustrate a concept within either linear or Cornell notes.

Cornell method

The Cornell notes method involves splitting your page into 3 sections:

- Cues - This is a column on the left of the page where you include any key terms or questions you have during the session.
- Notes - This is the main section of your notes on the right side of the page where you write up your detailed notes.
- Summary - This is a small section at the bottom of the notes where you summarise the key points. To aid with retention further, cover the main notes section and try to write your summary using only the key words.

The benefit of this method it is aids better information retention.

Apps and software

If you choose to create digital notes, there are plenty of software and apps for you to choose from, and some of the most common are explored below. You may want to try a few of the options to work out what is best for you personally.

Microsoft Word

Microsoft Word is a good choice for making digital notes because it is simple to use (and you will probably have used it before), it is available to download as part of the [Office 365 package](#) available to you while you are studying at Edge Hill University and has lots of features to help you such as headings, highlighting and bullet points, and the dictate function which lets you speak your notes instead of typing. It works on many different devices and if you work through OneDrive, your work will be available to you on any device and saves automatically so you can avoid losing the notes if your device loses power.

OneNote

OneNote is also available to you through the [Office 365 package](#) you can download while a student here at Edge Hill University. OneNote is a little more sophisticated than Microsoft Word as you can create a digital notebook which can contain sections to split your notes by session or by topic. You ehu.ac.uk/uniskills ehu.ac.uk/ls

could create a separate notebook for each module and have sections for each lecture, seminar and reading you do. It is more intuitive than word as you can easily add text and media such as images, draw diagrams, record audio and add links anywhere on the page - similar to a physical notebook. It also automatically saves, and if you work in OneDrive your work will be available on all of your devices too.

Inspiration

Inspiration allows you to create visual notes such as a mind map which is great if this is more memorable to you - this is available for free to all Edge Hill staff and students via the [Assistive Technology page](#). It allows you to use colour and diagrams to make links between information visually and keeps you engaged as it is a very active learning process. You can add in multimedia such as links, images, videos and screenshots to keep all of your information together in one place, as well as standard features such as highlighting and colour coding.

Recording and transcription apps

Recording audio from classes can be a useful tool to capture information and revisit it later as many times as you want and avoid missing anything important. It is especially useful for accessibility too, however there are a few points to consider. Recording an entire session isn't the same as making good notes because you still need to listen back and draw out the most important points. Transcription can also make mistakes, or the audio could be unclear in parts meaning you may miss out on important information. You would also need permission from those you are recording. However, recording apps are a great option to capture your thoughts on the go, or to dictate your thoughts to as an initial process rather than as a replacement for your own notes.

Highlighting, annotating and abbreviations

When making notes on other material such as a reading or lecture slides, you could use techniques such as highlighting, annotating or abbreviations. However, it is important to avoid the pitfalls of these methods to ensure your time is spent on meaningful notes. Remember, your notes should be easy to follow, succinct, and can still be understood when you revisit them at a later date. If you're asking yourself why you highlighted something or what your abbreviations mean, you could have fallen victim to passive highlighting, or a complicated abbreviation system so use these wisely!

Highlighting

Highlighting is a great way to indicate key information but do be wary of falling foul of false learning. Only highlight what is necessary and you may want to use highlighting alongside annotation to make sure you understand why you highlighted certain notes in the first place. You may want to highlight related ideas in the same colour to make it easier to form links between these later or use different colours for strengths and weaknesses to show your critical thinking.

Annotation

Annotation is also a useful technique, especially if used alongside highlighting. By combining these two approaches you could add context to your thinking by annotating each highlighted point. This means your highlighting will still make sense when you revisit it at a later date. You may only have a small space to annotate so keep your points succinct to make room for others, make sure any links to highlighting are clear by using arrows and ensure you understand any abbreviations you use too.

Abbreviations

Trying to keep up with a lecturer talking or fitting your notes into a small space when annotating can be a challenge so using **abbreviations** can help. While there are many abbreviations you can use, you will need to work out which abbreviations **work for you** as if you don't **remember** what they mean, your notes may be **useless** later when you revisit them! It may take a little **trial and error** to work out what makes sense to you, and you may want to keep a **key** of your abbreviations to refer back to if needed.

Using generative AI tools for note-making

Generative AI (GenAI) is a tool that can be useful when used correctly. You should familiarise yourself with the University guidance on ethical uses of AI to ensure you are avoiding academic misconduct - this guidance should be available to you on Learning Edge, and further information and support can be found on the [UniSkills GenAI](#) page.

Activity: Benefits and drawbacks of GenAI for note-making

For the statements below, decide which ones would be under the headings 'Benefits' or 'Drawbacks'.
The answers can be found after the activity.

- Turn notes into a podcast
- Could lead to accidental plagiarism
- Unsure how your data/uploaded information is being used
- May hallucinate information or make up references
- Improves accessibility for non-native English speakers
- Improves accessibility for students with learning differences
- Lack of human judgement – GenAI cannot distinguish tone or context
- Summarise long notes into something meaningful
- Turn your notes into flashcards for revision
- May pick up on something you missed in the session and fill any learning gaps
- May not include the correct references for information
- May not summarise information correctly
- Loss of nuance and your own interpretation of information
- Can save time summarising long notes

Answers

Here are the answers for the activity above:

Benefits:

- Turn notes into a podcast
- Improves accessibility for non-native English speakers
- Improves accessibility for students with learning differences
- Summarise long notes into something meaningful
- Turn your notes into flashcards for revision
- May pick up on something you missed in the session and fill any learning gaps
- Can save time summarising long notes

Drawbacks:

- Could lead to accidental plagiarism
- Unsure how your data/uploaded information is being used
- May hallucinate information or make up references
- Lack of human judgement – GenAI cannot distinguish tone or context
- May not include the correct references for information
- May not summarise information correctly
- Loss of nuance and your own interpretation of information

When to make notes

Creating notes isn't a one-time thing - it's something you do before, during and after a session. Let's explore this process for lectures and seminars, and while reading or doing independent study.

Notes for lectures and seminars

Before you attend

It helps to do a bit of prep before a lecture or seminar. You don't need to do a lot of reading, just enough to make sense of the topic you'll be learning. Without this, it could be harder to join in discussions or recognise the key points when you're making notes.

The points below explore some of the ways you could prepare for lectures and seminars.

- What is the session about? Check your module handbook or the slides first. This gives you a sense of the structure and helps you pick out key ideas.
- What are the learning outcomes? This is what you should understand at the end of the session or module. You could add these to your notes to stay focused.
- Are there any new terms or concepts? Do a little research beforehand so you have some understanding before the session.
- Have you been set reading or an activity beforehand? Go through these in advance. If not, it can be harder to know what to focus on in your notes.

- How does this session relate to your assignment? Think about how they link together. This can help you focus on what is most useful to note down.
- What do you already know? Identify any knowledge gaps so you know what to focus on in your notes and what questions to ask.

For all of the suggestions above, you may want to make some notes to take with you to the lecture or seminar so you know what to focus on, the questions you want answers to and the general topic that will be covered. You can then add to these throughout the session to complete your understanding of the topic.

During the session

When you attend a lecture or seminar, you won't note down every single thing word for word. Instead you will have to pick up on clues about what you should be noting down or what may be important.

Below are a few ideas of what your notes may include:

- Follow the structure of the session using headings for each main topic covered. This means you can follow your notes alongside any slides provided when you revisit them later and they will still make sense.
- Note down the key concepts and definitions of new terms - this could include any technical language used, terms that are new to you in your discipline, or any distinctions drawn by your tutor.
- Include any evidence your tutor discusses so you can explore this further for an assignment - this could include authors and theorists, and their arguments, quotes or theories so you can do further research after the session. Remember to include a page number and quotation marks for quotes so you don't accidentally plagiarise them in your assignments!

After the session

Note-taking doesn't end when the session ends. Instead, it is an ongoing process to ensure you retain the information you have written down and can come back to it at a later date. Think about a session you attended last week - could you state the main points you learned from attending? If not, the following tips should help you to retain more information. There are 3 key things you should do after any note-taking session:

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- **Write a short summary:** After a session, write a short summary of the main things you've learned - just a few bullet points. This helps you retain information and makes it easy to revisit later.
- **Store the notes logically:** Whether you make digital or handwritten notes, you need to have an organised system to store them. We'll cover this later in the toolkit.
- **Revisit your notes:** Did you know most information is forgotten within 24 hours? Revisiting your notes early ensures you remember more information.

Notes for reading

Making notes while reading requires similar skills as taking notes during lectures or seminars, the main difference being that instead of receiving the information to note down, you're now reading for it. You will make notes on similar points as above such as the reference information of the text as well as key points, quotes and figures that may be useful to you.

For more in-depth support with your reading, you may wish to visit our [Academic Reading Toolkit](#).

Activity: Before, during and after reading

Based on what you already know about notes and the process for lectures and seminars, have a go at deciding if the statements below are something you would do before, during or after reading to explore your understanding of note-making for your reading.

- Schedule in time to revisit these notes
- Write down your learning outcomes
- Write down any quotes you may wish to use with a page number and quotation marks
- Write down the keywords from the text
- Make links with your assignment in your notes
- Write down how this argument links to other authors – do they agree?
- Store your notes in an organised system
- Write down answers to your questions
- Create a summary of the key points to revisit
- Add any useful points into an assignment plan or revision flashcards

- Write down the main/key points from the text
- Write down what you want to find out from the text
- Write down any questions you might have about your topic
- Write down any links between this text and others as you read

Answers

Here are the answers for the activity above:

Before:

- Write down your learning outcomes
- Write down what you want to find out from the text
- Write down any questions you might have about your topic

During:

- Write down any quotes you may wish to use with a page number and quotation marks
- Write down the keywords from the text
- Make links with your assignment in your notes
- Write down how this argument links to other authors – do they agree?
- Write down answers to your questions
- Write down the main/key points from the text
- Write down any links between this text and others as you read

After:

- Schedule in time to revisit these notes
- Store your notes in an organised system
- Create a summary of the key points to revisit
- Add any useful points into an assignment plan or revision flashcards

Notes for revision

Revision notes are a little different to other types of notes as you are usually actively trying to move information to long term memory, so they need to be part of an active process. This often means bringing together and refining the notes you have already made into something that is easy to revise from.

You can find out more about notes for revision in the [Exam Preparation Toolkit](#).

Storing your notes logically

After you have finished taking notes, whether that be for lectures and seminars, reading or revision, you need a logical system to store them to make it easier to revisit them later.

Storing handwritten notes

To store handwritten notes, you could:

- Have a different notebook/folder for each module/topic and label these clearly or even choose a different colour.
- Leave a page blank at the beginning so you can create a table of contents at the start of your notebook/folder to make finding notes much easier.
- Use dividers or tabs to indicate different topics.

Storing digital notes

To store digital notes, you could:

- Use cloud storage such as OneDrive as documents automatically save as you are working. This means you could avoid losing any work and can access it on any device.
- Create a folder for each module and year of study - this makes finding your notes for different assignments much easier.
- Name your notes logically - this could be naming them after the lecture or seminar title, naming them by week, or naming them by date.

Find what works for you

There is no one way to make notes and hopefully this toolkit has given you lots of tools, tips and ideas to get started, but don't forget to ask for help if you are struggling! Finding what works for you can be a little bit of trial and error, testing different methods and mediums to see what suits you. The main thing is that you don't give up - you may feel like you don't make good notes yet, but with a little time, patience, and practice, you'll soon be on your way to being a note-making pro!

Play the [video](#) as a summary of this toolkit. Alternatively, you can access the **video transcript** as a [Word](#) or [PDF version](#).

Related Resources

Here is a list of reading and resources to support and explore ...

Useful Links

Useful links

- This resource from [Manchester Academic Phrasebank](#) can help with the 'phraseological 'nuts and bolts' of academic writing.'
- Check out our [UniSkills Being Critical toolkit](#) which provides an interactive opportunity to learn more about criticality.

UniSkills Blogs

UniSkills write regular [blogs](#), including a monthly focus on library resources and academic skills. In these quick reads you can learn about useful resources, how to access them and their benefits to your studies. You might even find us exploring new ways of thinking!

Other resources

Check out [LinkedIn Learning](#) for access to **free**, unlimited access to thousands of high-quality **online courses** and **video tutorials** written by industry experts.

UniSkills Support at Edge Hill University

As well as our toolkits, there are many ways you can access support for your academic skills development. No question or query is too big or too small. Whether you are new to studying or need to refresh or develop skills, we have a range of options for you to access at both graduate and postgraduate taught level.

Webpages

Reach your potential and visit our [UniSkills web pages](#). Find out more about the support designed to help you develop your academic skills and confidence at university and beyond. Whatever your subject or level of study, UniSkills has something to offer.

Workshops and webinars

[UniSkills workshops and webinars](#) are an opportunity for a deeper dive into a specific skill that will support you on your academic journey. Facilitated by our friendly and knowledgeable Academic Skills Advisors, these sessions provide an informal safe space where you will be supported alongside other students in a small group setting.

Appointments

All students are able to book a [one-to-one appointment](#). Our experienced Academic Skills Advisors can help you develop your academic skills and strategies throughout your time at university. One-to-one support is available on a wide range of topics including academic reading, writing and referencing, finding information, and preparing your assignment for submission.

AskUs

For any questions across any of our library and learning services, you can [Ask Us](#) online.

Campaigns

Explore our year-round [UniSkills campaigns](#) to enhance your academic journey at Edge Hill. From pre-arrival prep to acing your exams, we've got something for everyone!

Keep in touch

Library and Learning Services Instagram

Make sure you're following us over on Instagram for all the latest Library and Learning Services news, events and support: [@EHULibrary](#)

You'll discover: weekly what's on stories; reminders about upcoming campaigns and events; fun, interactive polls and competitions; hidden treasures from our Archive; and reading for pleasure recommendations.

Library and Learning Services Blog

In the [Library and Learning Services \(LS\) blog](#) you'll find lots of information, ideas and support curated by a wide range of staff and students from across the service.

Browse through all our useful blogs via the Home tab or visit individual areas of interest via the sub-blog headings along the menu bar.

Your views count

Thank you for engaging with this toolkit. We'd love to know what you thought, and you can share your feedback in our short [UniSkills Toolkit Satisfaction Survey](#). The survey should take you no longer than five minutes to complete.

Your feedback helps us to continually improve our support - thank you!

You have now completed this UniSkills toolkit and can close the document. We hope you found it useful, and we look forward to continuing to support you with your academic skills development.