Taking effective lecture notes is one of the key skills that students in Third Level Education need to learn. It is a skill that will serve you well throughout your College years and will ensure that you perform better at exam time.

Why take notes during lectures?

- Taking notes ensures that students are actively listening to what lecturers are teaching.
- Your notes ensure that you have an accurate account of what was taught during the lecture.
- Reviewing your notes after the lecture has finished, allows you to interpret, condense and organise the information given to you by your lecturer.
- Re-reading these notes before exams, will allow you to remember key information.

What preparations should I make before attending my lecture?

- Ideally you should always use a Ring Binder instead of a spiral or bound book, this will give you an opportunity to file your notes in sequence later on.
- The use of a highlighter will allow you to take particular note of key topics that are likely to resurface at exam time.
- Familiarise yourself with prescribed reading before the lecture begins, this will ensure that you are familiar with the subject being discussed & will result in better note taking.

Listening is a key skill when taking notes.

- Students should always make a conscious effort to pay attention to what is being said in a lecture.
- Avoid distractions like personal electronic devices and concentrate on listening & taking useful notes. Remember that paying attention now will reward you at exam time.
- During the lecture, take a moment to think about what is being said. Does the material connect to what was already discussed in a previous lecture? If so, make sure you take note of these connections so that you can review them at a later stage or perhaps discuss with your lecturer.
- Listen to what your lecturer is saying and learn to pick out 'key concepts'. You don't have to take note of absolutely everything.
- Pay particular attention to your lecturer's summary of the lecture at the end of each class. During this time, your lecturer may well emphasize particular points and might even suggest possible examination questions.

How do I take notes in class?

Many students still rely on good old fashioned pen and paper to take notes during class. In many cases, it can be just as easy especially where there is particular emphasis on equations, mathematical formulas etc. The traditional note taking method also works very well in language classes.

- Start your note taking for each class on a new page and date and number each page. The sequence of your notes is vital.
- It's a good idea to write on only one side of a page. This makes revision of your notes easier before exams.
- Leave plenty of room on the page for added commentary after the lecture has finished
- Always make notes as brief as possible

Cornell Note Style Template

| Keywords	Notes
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Summary

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Note Taking Styles

Many students use particular notetaking methods during class, these methods will help you to refine and organise your notes.

 Cornell Style Note Taking has become very popular among students since it allows you to easily organise and review notes. This simple design also means that you don't have to re-write your notes later.

• To use this style of note taking, simply divide your page into two columns.
• The column to the left of the page should be approximately 1/3 of the width of the page and should be labelled **Keywords**.
• The margin on the right hand side of the page should be labelled **Notes**. Beneath these two columns, mark off another section and this should be labelled **Summary**.
• During the lecture, write your notes in the **'Notes'** column and remember to take note of only key points. Ideally you should aim to capture meaningful facts delivered during the lecture.
• After the lecture, it's always a good idea to review the notes that you've taken in the note column. At this point you should try to refine each note that you've taken into a single keyword in the **keyword** column. These individual keywords will help you to revise and test yourself on a particular topic before exams.
• Finally you should write a brief **summary** of the notes that you've created at the bottom of the page. This should be a summary of main points from the lecture which put everything into context.
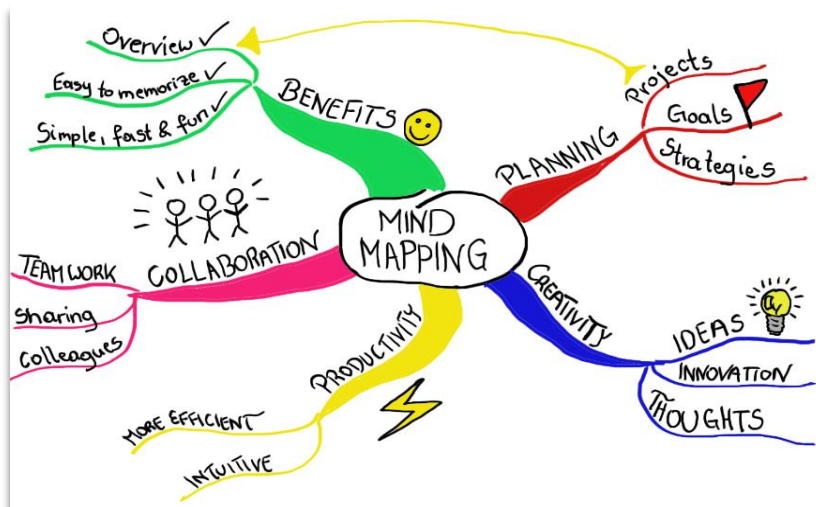
Mind mapping is another technique often used by students when taking notes. This particular style is very visual with students in essence drawing their notes as opposed to writing sentences. This non-linear, visual format suits some individuals and helps to identify connections that may well have been missed using more traditional forms of note taking. The use of mind mapping when note taking has also shown to assist in the retention of information.

• To mind map a lecture, you simply write the main topic of the lecture at the very centre of your page. As your lecturer makes other points during the course of the lecture, these are added around the central topic.
• You then draw lines connecting the different ideas. Depending on your personal preference, images can be used instead of words.

The only way to see if this mind mapping style of note taking suits your requirements is to try it. As mentioned earlier, it tends to suit some students, while others still prefer more conventional note taking techniques.
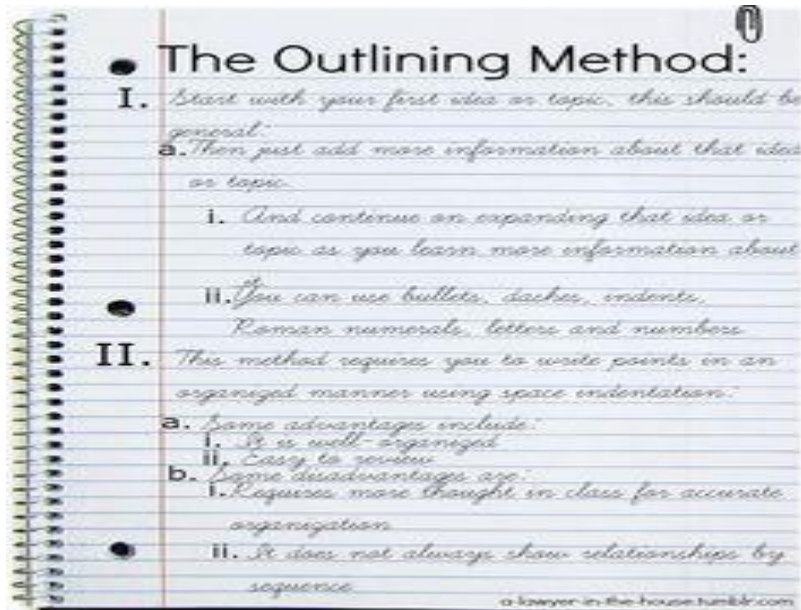
The **Outline Note Taking Method** is probably the most traditional of all note taking styles. It involves the student organising notes into main topics, sub topics and supporting details with indentations made to separate each category.

- Sometimes bullet points or a numbering system are used to make a distinction between points made but this is not essential as long as indentations have been used.
- This particular style is extremely easy to use where your lecturer is using a PowerPoint presentation during the course of their lecture.
- If you do use this style of note taking it does however help in some cases to re-write your notes at a later stage so that notes are legible and easily understood.
- This style of note taking also makes revision before exams particularly easy.

Taking Notes Electronically

Many students now prefer to take notes with a laptop or tablet, however it does help to be a fast typist if you plan on using this method. It also helps if you're familiar with various keyboard shortcuts that speed up the note taking process.

Students that use a laptop/tablet to take notes usually use a dedicated note taking program such as *Evernote* or *Microsoft OneNote*.

- *Evernote* is a comprehensive and free note taking application that allows students to electronically record and organise notes during a lecture. Notes taken on the Evernote desktop application automatically sync with your online Evernote account. Notes taken with Endnote are virtually stored in the cloud so you'll never have a problem losing them. Handwritten notes can also be stored digitally within Evernote using its image recognition software.
- Microsoft offers students another note taking program in the form of *OneNote*. This software is part of the Microsoft Office suite and works similarly to *Evernote*.

If you use a laptop or Tablet during class to take notes, you can also download a Cornell Notes template for Microsoft Office or download an App to your Tablet that will allow you format your notes in this particular note taking style. You can also use various Mind Mapping Software packages such as *Inspiration 9* to help you create your notes.

What should I do now that I've created my Notes?

- Reviewing & editing your notes after your lecture is finished is extremely important.
- It's important to do this shortly after the lecture has finished so that the content is still fresh in your mind.
- Edit Words or phrases that no longer make sense to you.
- Take note of anything in particular that you don't understand, this will allow you to ask your lecturer in the next class or to research the topic further on your own.
- Compare your notes to prescribed reading and fill in important details that you may have omitted.
- You should probably consider rewriting your notes at this point.

No matter which style of Note Taking you adopt during College, you should always aim to create notes that:

- Are organised, legible and easy to follow.
- Distinguish important points from general details.
- Include examples where possible.
- Are chronologically organised in your folder with notes from previous lectures.
- Should allow you to easily 'revise' at exam time.
- Should allow you to 'test your knowledge' on the topic prior to exams.

Further reading on notetaking skills:

JERZ, D. G. 2016. *Taking Notes: 5 College Success Tips | Jerz's Literacy Weblog* [Online]. Available: http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/academic1/taking-notes-5-college-success-tips/ [Accessed 15/04/2016].

KISSLINGER, E. 2009. *Contemporary topics 2: Academic listening and note-taking skills,* White Plains, NY, Pearson Education.

SCHEPMAN, A., RODWAY, P. BEATTIE, C. & LAMBERT, J. 2012. An observational study of undergraduate students' adoption of (mobile) note-taking software. *Computers in Human Behavior,* 28**,** 308-317.

STACY, E. M. & CAIN, J. 2015. Note-taking and Handouts in The Digital Age. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education,* 79**,** 1-6.