1. **Why make notes?**

   Notes are a permanent record of information that will help you prepare for seminars, presentations, assignments and examinations.

   Note-making helps you concentrate on what you are reading, watching or hearing; it helps you to understand new information and new ideas; noting things down in your own words helps to place them in your long-term memory.

   Effective note-making is a key academic skill; it is invaluable in helping you avoid plagiarism and study more efficiently.

2. **Do**
   - Be consistent – use a similar format each time you take notes.
   - Use a loose leaf approach that allows you to insert/arrange additional material.
   - Always record your sources – date, subject, lecturer, title, author, page no. etc.
   - Write on one side only.
   - Use "speech marks" or a different coloured pen to identify direct quotations.
   - Use abbreviations – but only if you’ll remember what they stand for!
   - Keep separate notebooks/binders/folders for each course – don’t muddle them.
   - Use colour, shape, dotted lines, to highlight, link, group ideas.

3. **Don’t**
   - Copy word for word – note down what you think are the key points.
   - Use ‘pocket’ notepads; give yourself room to spread out your writing and ideas.
   - Rely on PowerPoint handouts – make your own notes as well.
   - Worry if you miss something – aim to get the big picture rather than all the detail.
   - Consider any examples too obvious – note them down.
   - Write down more than you would want to read again.
3. **Methods of note-taking**

There are a number of different ways in which you can make notes, and each has its advantages and disadvantages. There’s no right or wrong way to make notes, but, as above, there is good and bad practice. So it’s worthwhile experimenting with a number of different styles to see which work best for you and are best for the subject you’re studying, and the activity you’re engaged in – lectures, reading, revising, preparing an assignment, etc. Alternatively, you might choose to create different styles of your own, using the best features of the methods described below:

### Linear notes

**Advantages**
- Simple and familiar approach.
- Good for listing information.
- Good for detail.

**Limitations**
- Order tends to follow the source.
- Difficult to go back and insert additional information.
- Repetitive format.
- Poor at conceptual/big picture level.
- Can reduce complex issues to lists and bullet-points.

### Keyword notes

**Advantages**
- Presents information in a clear and simple manner.
- Good for organising information into categories and hierarchies.
- Good for structuring information into a memorisable format.

**Limitations**
- Can segregate information in an artificial manner.
- Can reduce complex issues to lists and bullet-points.
- Only works with certain forms of information.
Time lines

Advantages
- Good for clarifying the sequence of complex events/ideas/etc.
- Clear, simple and logical.
- Good for structuring information into a memorisable format.

Limitations
- Limited space for detailed information.
- Can over-simplify a more complex picture.
- Can tend towards teleology.

Flow-chart notes

Advantages
- Presents complex processes/interactions in a simple, easy to understand manner.
- Can reduce large volume of text to simple graphics.
- More memorable and differentiated than plain text.
- Generates processed information.

Limitations
- Can be time consuming to construct.
- May require more than one go to get right.

Matrix/grid notes

Advantages
- Clarity
- Good for understanding a topic thematically.
- Good for deconstructing complex information.

Limitations
- Danger of categorising complex information in overly simple -ve/+ve terms.
- Space content for information.
Mind maps/spidergrams

Advantages
- Generates processed information.
- Highly personalised.
- 'Whole brain' activity.
- Can reduce large volume of text to simple graphics.
- Easy to arrange and link information.
- Good for showing connections/ big picture.
- More engaging than copying.

Limitations
- Can become messy/confused.
- Requires practice.

Herringbone notes

Advantages
- Clarity.
- Good for compare/contrast type approaches to a topic.
- Good for setting out arguments/ opposing viewpoints.

Limitations
- Danger of categorising complex information in overly simple –ve/ +ve terms.
- Space content for information.

4. **Making the most of your notes**

To make your notes an effective resource, spend some additional time processing the information you have collected while it’s still fresh in your mind; annotate, summarise, identify keywords, themes and topics – record questions that the notes address or raise. Making your notes meaningful now ensures that they will still be meaningful in weeks, months, even years time. If you just ‘file and forget’ your notes, they’ll be of little value to you in the future.

One method that encourages you to make the most of your notes is the **Cornell** approach (see overleaf). This promotes reflection, consistency and accurate record keeping, without stifling creativity since any style of note making can be used within the pro-forma:
The note-making and record keeping areas are filled-in during the note-making activity time, and the summary/digest and questions/keywords areas completed later on during reflection. (NB. use A3 size paper to ensure sufficient space for recording information; if this isn’t enough room, then you’re probably noting down too much information.)