

Note-taking and Note-making

LEAPS

Summer School 2014 Induction

Lindsay Jack, Edinburgh Law School

Session outline

Aim to cover:

- Overview of note-taking and note-making.
- Explain the importance of taking and making notes – and the difference between them!
- Identify some techniques to take/make effective notes in lectures/tutorials/from reading.
- Consider why effective notes are key to academic success.
- Summary of main points.

Overview

Note-taking and note-making are among many essential skills for success at university.

Building on your existing skills to start to move towards advanced level study.

Working on these skills helps you to get the most out of your studies and aids you in independent learning.

Overview

To take and make the most effective notes, you must first identify WHY you are taking or making notes. There can be many reasons, including:

To begin to explore a topic ;	To add to knowledge of a subject;
To prove a specific point ;	To contextualise information ;
To add to an argument ;	To disprove an argument ;
To learn how to do something;	To answer a specific question...

And a million more reasons! (not including 'because the lecturer told me to...!')

Note-taking

Taking notes in class. Class could be:

LECTURE

TUTORIAL

SEMINAR

WORKSHOP

PRACTICALS

GROUPWORK

FIELDWORK

INTERVIEW

...and many more!

Note-taking

In lectures:

- **Don't** be tempted to write down every single word.
- Do the background reading and look over general topic of lecture to understand context. This will help in deciding **what** to write down.
- **Experiment!** Some students prefer to type, others to write.
- **Look over** your notes as soon as you can after class to make sure you can follow up on any points.
- **Reflect and review.** Look over your notes regularly to ensure your note-taking is as useful as it can be.

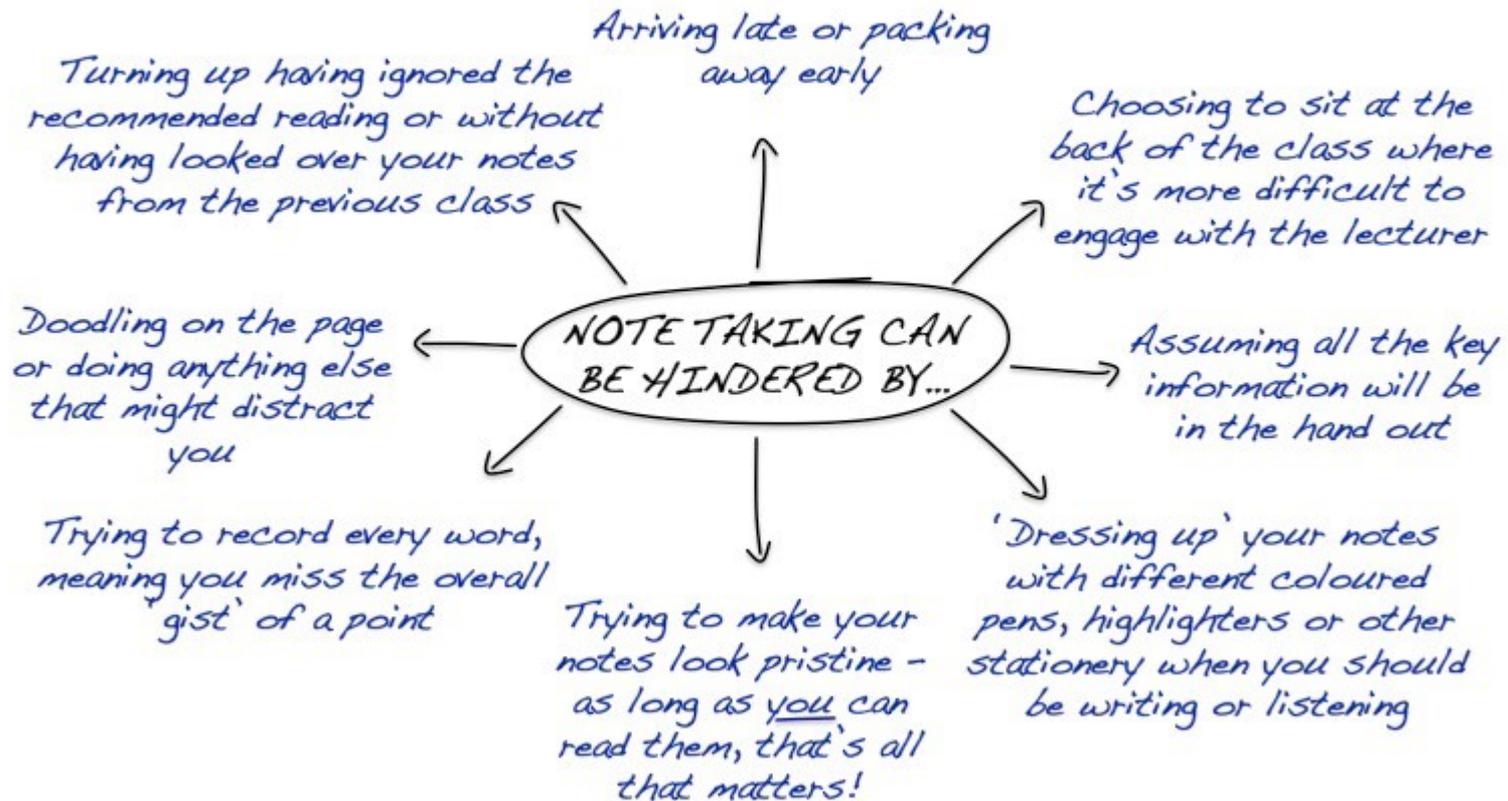
Note-taking

In tutorials:

- **Don't** be tempted to write down every single word.
- Without doubt, do the reading/work for tutorials.
- Normally, **no hiding** in tutorials so prepare as well you can.
- **Look over** your notes as soon as you can after class to make sure you can follow up on any points.
- **Reflect and review.** Look over your notes regularly to ensure your note-taking is as useful as it can be.

When good notes go bad...?

FACTORS THAT REDUCE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NOTE TAKING



Note-making

Making notes is different as they are the resources you create yourself. They tend to be more concise.

As mentioned earlier, the first step to knowing what kind of notes to make is to think about **WHY** you are making notes. For example, are you:

Clarifying notes from class and making them neater and easier to understand?

Reading for an essay or other assessment?

Trying to connect ideas together?

Revising for exams?

Note-making

From reading:

- Don't just copy out whole sections and paragraphs.
- Be certain you know **WHY** you are reading. This will help you to work out what is important and needs to be written down.
- You might want to skim through the chapter/piece quickly first to see the layout, headings and main themes. This might help you organise your thoughts and understand the structure.
- Use highlighters sparingly – they're for highlights, not a new colour scheme.
- Have a deadline for when you will stop reading. You'll need time to process and reflect on what you've read.

Note-making : styles and techniques

There is no one 'right' method. Some ideas include:

Smaller and smaller...

Original notes from class or reading.

These are longer and less concise.

Making them shorter will aid understanding and help identify learning gaps.

Notes are reduced by about half by this stage.

By now, notes are much shorter.

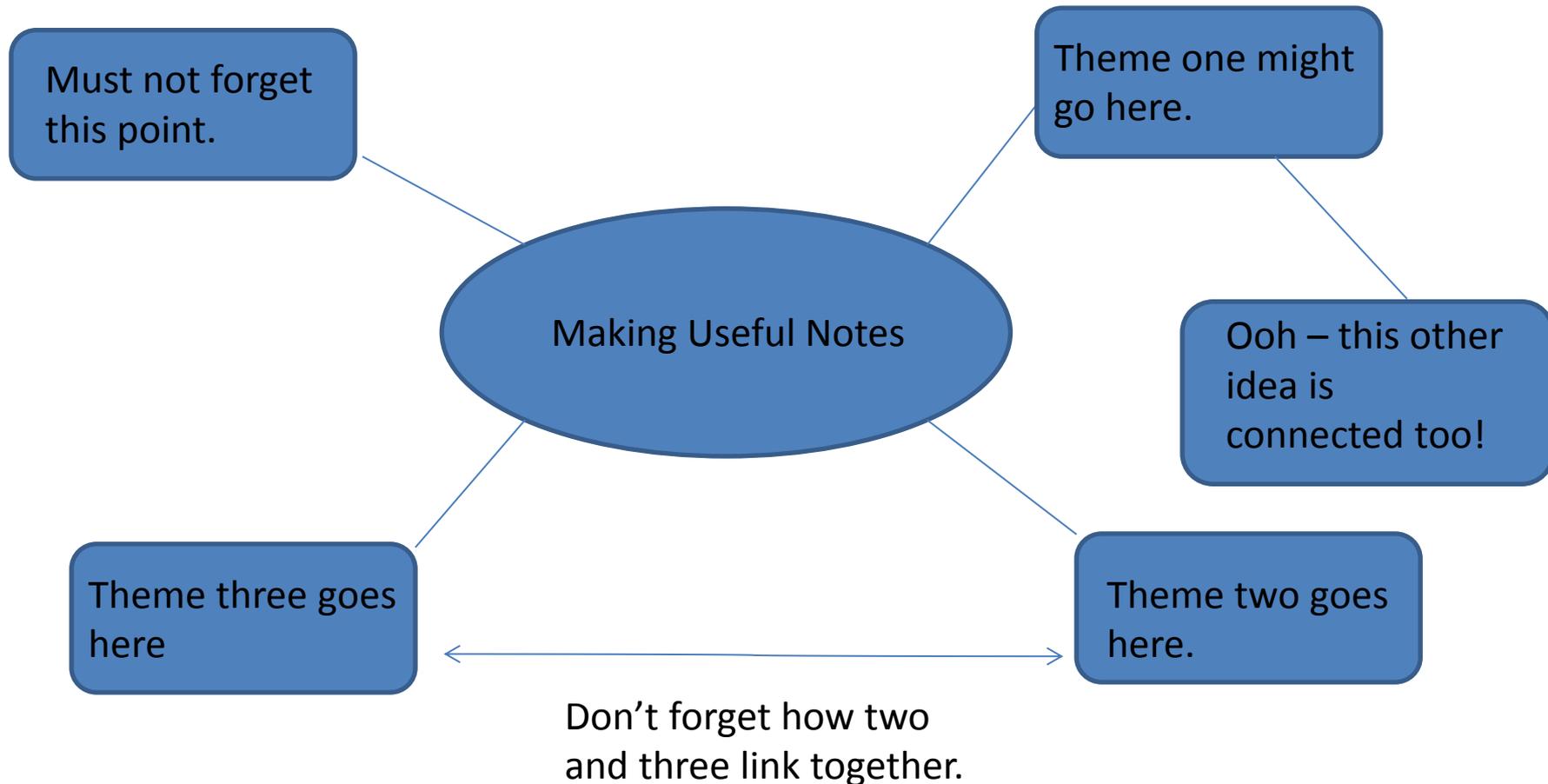
Note-making : styles and techniques

Linear Notes

- 1. Linear notes can be in list form.**
- 2. They look neat and have nice**
 - 2.1. Sub-headings
 - 2.2. As well as being in a logical order.
- 3. BUT...** they might encourage you to copy down rather than think about ideas.
- 4. AND...** they don't allow flexibility in linking ideas.

Note-making : styles and techniques

Spider Diagrams/Mind Maps



Note-making : why so important?

Taking and making effective notes for study is arguably the most important thing you have to get to grips with at university. But WHY?

Notes...

...help you to **understand topics** and also identify areas you are unsure of.

...allow you to start **thinking about assessment**.

...force you to **think logically and methodically**.

...help you **track progress through courses**.

...**prepare you for exams** – reflect regularly to ensure your style and system works for you. Revision for exams will be so much easier with decent sets of notes that make sense to you.

Get organised!

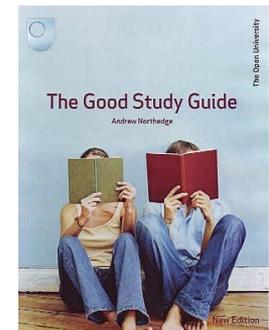
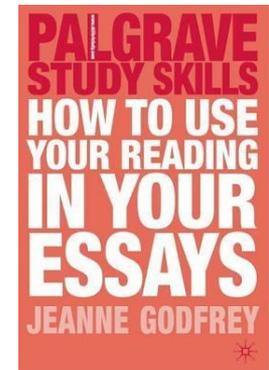
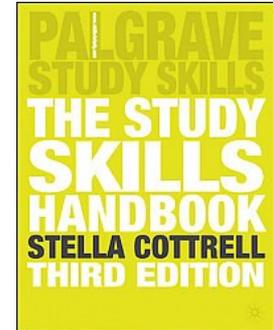
- Once you have made your notes, you will want to ensure they are organised and easy to access.
- Organised notes will help you to track your progress through courses and help identify areas of confusion or misunderstanding.
- Decide on a system, whether that's by subject, topic, week, class, semester etc.
- You will feel a sense of achievement when you can see your progress.
- Disorganised notes = disorganised student.
- Disorganised student = stressed student.

Session summary

- Note-taking and making are skills and, like all skills, can be mastered through practice.
- You will begin to listen to/read information in a **more critical** way as you become more familiar with your academic subject. This will help you to identify what information is **RELEVANT, IMPORTANT** and **CREDIBLE** and therefore needs to be written down.
- How you take and make notes will depend on the subject, context and the way you work best. You will need to reflect on your skills as you progress.
- We covered a few practical tips for taking and making notes.
- Finally, we looked at just why it's so important to make sure your notes work for you.

Resources

- Cottrell, S, 'The Study Skills Handbook', third edition, 2008, Palgrave MacMillan.
- Godfrey, J, 'How to Use Your Reading in Your Essays', first edition, 2013, Palgrave MacMillan.
- Northedge, A, 'The Good Study Guide', first edition, 2005, The Open University.



Resources (continued)

- Reid, M and Williams, K, 'Time Management', first edition, 2011, Palgrave MacMillan
- *Thanks also to James Lamb for sharing his resources on this topic.*

