Techniques and Tips

Write phrases, not full sentences. Only record the key words that you need to get the idea of the point. Skip words like “the” and “a” that don’t add additional meaning to the lecture content. Retain key technical or discipline-specific terms.

Take notes in your own words. Paraphrase what you hear so it makes sense to you—it helps you to understand and remember what you hear. Try to paraphrase everything except where information needs to be noted exactly.

Structure your notes with headings, subheadings and numbered lists. Use headings to indicate topic areas or to include bibliographic details of the sources of information. Use outline form and/or a numbering system and indenting to help you distinguish major from minor points and as a clear way of indicating the structure of lecture information.

Code your notes—use colour and symbols to mark structure and emphasis.

Use colour to highlight major sections, main points and diagrams. You can also use different colours to classify and link concepts or information by topic. However, don’t focus too much on colour coding when you’re in the lecture. It requires time and concentration, so it’s more useful to do most of the highlighting and underlining when you’re revising your notes later.

Underline, circle, star, etc. to identify key information, examples, definitions, or other important materials. Devise your own marking code to indicate each type.

If you miss something, write key words, skip a few spaces, and get the information later. Leave a space on the page for your own notes and comments.

Use Symbols and Abbreviations

Symbols and abbreviations for frequently used words, phrases or names are useful for note taking in lectures when speed is essential. It’s important to be consistent so you remember what they represent and can use them easily. Keep a ‘key list’ of frequently used symbols/abbreviations and their meanings so that you can refer to them in the future.

Abbreviations and acronyms for note taking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Common</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>etc. (etcetera) = and the rest</td>
<td>para = paragraph</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g. = for example</td>
<td>ch. = chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>info = information</td>
<td>no. = number</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.e. = that is</td>
<td>diff = different</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n.b. = note well, important</td>
<td>C19 = nineteenth century</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p = page (pp = pages)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 2. Discipline-Specific

These should be whatever is frequently used in your field of study.

In chemistry: Au for gold, Mg for magnesium.

In the case of quantities and concepts, these are represented by Greek letters in many fields.

A or a (alpha) B or b (beta)

### 3. Personal

Develop your own set so that you don’t have to write every word in full. You can shorten any word that is commonly used in your lectures.

- Gov = government
- nec = necessary

Work out a system you’ll remember and use it consistently. Introduce a few symbols and abbreviations at a time to help you remember them.

### 4. Acronyms

Some abbreviations are so well known and widely used that they have become acronyms—abbreviations pronounced as words. For example:

- Laser = Light Amplification by Stimulation Emission of Radiation
- ABC = Australian Broadcasting Corporation

### Symbols for note taking

- \(=\) equals/is equal to/is the same as
- \(!=\) is not equal to/is not the same as
- \(\equiv\) is equivalent to
- \(\therefore\) therefore, thus, so
- \(\because\) because
- \(\oplus\) and, more, plus
- \(\succ\) more than, greater than
- \(\prec\) less than
- \(-\) less, minus
- \(\rightarrow\) gives, causes, produces, leads to, results in, is given by, is produced by, results from, comes from
- \(\uparrow\) rises, increases by
- \(\downarrow\) falls, decreases by
- \(\propto\) proportional to
- \(\not\propto\) not proportional to
Use concept maps and diagrams

Information can also be recorded using a concept map or diagram. Try drawing diagrams or pictures for concepts that are hard to note quickly. For instance, draw a pie chart to roughly indicate the relative strength of political parties in an election instead of writing these details out. Information can be added to the concept map later.

Concept maps can easily become cluttered. Use both facing pages of an open A4 notebook to set out your concept map and allow plenty of space for adding ideas and symbols.

- Begin in the middle of the page and add ideas on branches that radiate from the central idea or from previous branches.
- Arrows and words can be used to show links between parts of the concept map.
- Colour and symbols are important parts of concept maps, helping illustrate ideas and triggering your own thoughts.

Examples