

S4 Steps to Success

Blog: Note Taking Tips



Hannah here, development worker with LIFT OFF.

This is the last, but by no means least, in our series of blogs for S4 Steps to Success!

Hold on to your hat's folks, we've saved the best til last. Cause this week, it's all about note taking...

Ok, so it's possibly not the most exciting subject in the world, but if you're thinking about continuing with your studies after school, applying for jobs, creating CVs or presentations, preparing for job interviews, researching that trip of a lifetime or building your dream home; then I'd bet my little cotton socks you'll be taking some form of notes along the way.

For me, I can safely say that I had no idea how to take notes starting out. In fact, I think I'd go a step further and say I pretty much did the opposite of what's been recommended in these weekly blogs.

I had no [goals](#).

I didn't recognise when I was [stressed out](#), or how to manage it.

I certainly didn't [manage my time](#).

[Organisation](#)?

Never heard of it.

I was a 'roll out of bed and see where the day takes me' kinda gal. My 'notes' were a crumpled heap at the bottom of my bag in no particular order, normally with some sort of congealed fruit stuck to it – copied word for word from the blackboard; cause that's what it looked like everyone else in class was doing? Yes, a blackboard. I am **that** old.

Guaranteed, the night before every exam or submission date, I'd pull those scabby notes out, wipe away the congealed fruit, and try and make sense of my scribbles. Copying them out repeatedly in the hope I'd memorise them, and form proper sentences from the random words I'd jotted down. This strategy, and I call it that loosely, got me through my early learning journey by the skin of my teeth. It's not one I would recommend.

Tip number 1 – just eat the fruit. Sticking your hand in a mouldy banana is something to avoid if possible.



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Thankfully my note taking has evolved somewhat since those days, and I use it now more than ever. Note is a valuable skill that and if you nail your style and what works for you early on, it can be a game changer. Here are **5 things** I've learned about note taking:

1. There is no right way to take notes.

You heard it here first The reason you take notes is to process and understand the information that is being given to you. So, it's important to do what **works for you**. My notes are covered in scribbles, arrows, questions, symbols, thoughts, comments and possibly the odd rude doodle; but they work for me!

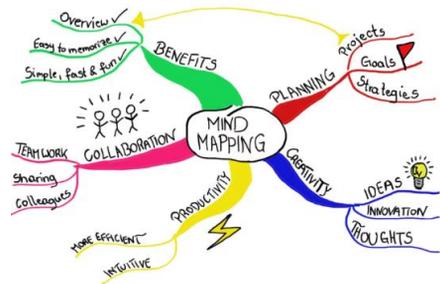
Check out these [tips](#) and [different note taking methods](#) for some inspiration.

2. Preparation is key.

At the start of each academic year, I like to take a bit of time to organise myself. I look at each subject, overviews of the course, main concepts, assessment dates, and create folders for each to start collating everything. I find planning and organising ahead of time not only means my note taking is more efficient, but it also reduces my stress levels!

3. Note taking isn't just copying down words.

Find methods that are simple, quick, and effective that you can use while actively listening to the information being given. For me, pen and paper are my go-to. I've come up with a variety of short hand, abbreviations, and symbols over the years. Include references, quotes, thoughts, ideas, comments, or questions. Check out these notetaking [tips](#) to create your own note taking style.



4. You don't have to just use pen and paper.

With technology now moving at a pace that I can no longer keep up with, the list of ways to collate and take notes is endless. I've recently found the joy of One Note (thank you global pandemic). OneNote is a free digital note taking tool which you can use to take notes, record audio, capture screenshots, add videos, to collate and organise your notes. I can't imagine life without it. Find out more about digital note taking tools [here](#).

5. It's ok to ask for help.

Not only is it ok, but it can also sometimes be a vital part of the note taking process if you don't get it – ask! If there isn't an opportunity to ask there and then, write your question down to ask or investigate later. Questions don't just have to be directed at teachers or lecturers; have a discussion with classmates, peers, family, or colleagues – sometimes different and fresh perspectives can really help!