

## How To Take Notes

1. The purpose of the meeting determines the type of notes you will take:
  - a) What will you need to remember from the meeting?
  - b) If you need to record key details you need to know (dates, names, deadlines, resources, etc.), you probably want to list points in the order they come up and use shapes (boxes) and/or colours to highlight the key details. This is a notes list.
  - c) If you want to organize your thoughts on a big idea or problem, you may prefer mindmapping. Put the idea or problem name in the center of the mindmap. Draw branches off that center topic as new sub-topics come up. Around those branches, write down your key information (the same stuff you'd write down in a list) so that details are clumped around the appropriate sub-topic. If you run out of room, start another page with the sub-idea or possible solution in the center. Use colours and shapes to group ideas that are not on the same branch but that need to be linked.
  - d) If someone else will have to work from your notes or if the notes will be a legal document, make sure your writing is legible and list the abbreviations or symbols that you used at the end of the notes.
  - e) If you wish to formulate good questions about things you didn't understand from the meeting, mindmapping is useful, either for note-taking during the meeting or as a separate exercise after the meeting based on your notes list.
2. Put the date, meeting topic or title and page number on the page before you start. List the participants.
  - A useful title is two or three words that encapsulate what you need to remember from the meeting.
3. For notes lists:
  - If you know the agenda beforehand, plan to write a one word heading per agenda item. Under each heading, write notes as (bullet) points. Make new agenda item headings as needed.
  - Leave 2.5 cm space in the left and right margins of the page.
    - o In the left margin, put prominent information (e.g., me next to actions for you to carry out)
    - o In the right margin, put one or two words to remember your questions by. Also put later information that adds to a topic that has already been discussed.
  - If two people are debating, write one sentence for each to summarize what each one said/concluded.
  - Distill each person's point into just one or two words if possible, including your own questions.
  - Write down your questions as they occur to you. When you get the answers, write them down.
  - Write down potential problems that occur to you, even if you do not ask a question.
  - At the end of the meeting, look at your notes and add material, cross it out (if there have been many changes of plan during the meeting), or make it prominent, as needed:
    - o What do you need to remember from this meeting? Write it down and make it prominent (e.g., draw a shape around it or color it).
    - o What did you learn? Write it down at the end or next to the relevant words in your notes.
    - o What must you tell someone else who needs to know about the details of this meeting?
    - o What do you need to take action on? Write it down and make it prominent. If you need to note actions for other people to do or decisions taken, draw up a decisions/an actions list:

Action (Decision)	Who	Due When (Vote Count)

4. Using a computer to take notes:
 

Use a computer if your handwritten notes tend to be illegible, but be aware that it distances you from the other meeting participants and that they may suspect you of not paying attention.
5. Speed.
  - Write shorthand or use symbols (arrows and exclamation and question marks) instead of words.
  - Write numbers, nouns and verbs. Omit as many articles and prepositions as possible. Abbreviate words (i.e., reco for recommendation) and omit vowels in long words.
  - Write on a paper copy of the agenda, adding words in the margins and beneath points as needed.

Adapted from <https://www.safaribooksonline.com/blog/2015/02/12/how-to-take-good-notes/>