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Digital Notes for Studying.

Digital notes offer an alternative to paper-based notes and provide extra functions that can be useful in your studies:

- They can be stored in the cloud, allowing them to be accessed from multiple devices and locations.

- They can incorporate a variety of media such as: typed text, handwritten text, images, audio, video, web clippings, and links to other content.

There are many online resources and apps for notetaking. This guide will offer tips for deciding which platform/s to use and getting the best out of your digital notes.

What do you need from your notes?

Most students need their notes to perform a few key functions: to store information in a range of media; to annotate and highlight text-based information; to organise it into a usable structure so that items are easy to locate; and to process it so that the key points are easily visible.

Here are some questions that will help you to think about what you need from your notes and to develop a strategy that works for you:

- What kind of information do you need to include in your notes: recording, handwritten text, typing, photographs, drawings, graphs, or a mixture of all of these?

- Where will you take the notes? What devices do you have available?

- Where will you access the notes? What will you have with you when you need to use them?

- Would you like to store your notes in one place? Or across multiple platforms?

- Do you take different kinds of notes: from reading, seminars and fieldwork? What do you need to record in each different setting?

What apps or software will you use?

The next step is to choose where to keep your notes. There are many applications offering a wide range of different options. Here are a few to help get you started:

- Evernote

- Microsoft Onenote

- Foxit

- Google drive

Setting up your notes:

Before you start keeping notes, you should decide on a structure for organising them. Most notes packages include functions for keeping notes in different folders or notebooks. It is helpful to group units of content together. For example, you might

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have a notebook on Shakespeare with separate pages for *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Twelfth Night*. Or a folder for each module with separate files for each seminar. If your notes are organised under clear headings they will be easier to find.

- If your notes will include a variety of media, look for a platform where these can all be stored in one place.

- Where will you keep references and links? You may want to create a box for these in each note. Or a page in each notebook.

- How will you differentiate between your words and those of other people: different colours, fonts, bold, or boxes for quotation? Find a method and stick to it consistently.

- Where possible try to paraphrase and summarise content; this is a useful way of making sure you have understood it.

- Include a page for new or important vocabulary in your subject.

Highlighting and annotating written texts:

- If your work involves reading and annotating journal articles, there are PDF readers which allow you to highlight sections and pin notes to parts of the text.

- Some e-books available through NELSON allow sections to be downloaded as PDFs, or contain a notes and highlight function within the reading package.

- You can store these texts as files on your device or cloud storage, but there are also free apps such as Mendeley which allow you to store and catalogue them in the cloud. Mendeley also includes a PDF reader for highlighting and annotating PDFs.

Making notes in online seminars:

- Start by collating your notes from reading and pre-session activities into the document.

- Make skeleton notes, including questions and key points. You can fill the gaps and add detail with more research later.

- You may want to include screenshots or links to resources sent by your tutor in the notes.

- Use virtual sticky notes to create a list of things to look up later.

- After the seminar, add any missing information and edit your notes for clarity.

Using notes to recall information:

You have collected information in your notes, but this is not the end of the process. Now is a good time to review the notes you have just made and summarise the important points while they are fresh in your mind. This way you will not have to re-read lots of text to access key content.

- Make a list of key points in a box at the top of each page.

- Write a summary.

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Learning Development

- Use a bullet point list to summarise the argument of journal articles and book chapters on a sticky note or attached note. Some apps will allow you to annotate by hand directly onto the page.

Research notes:

If you are a postgraduate researcher and your notes contain sensitive data, you should seek guidance from your supervisor or the Graduate School about the most appropriate place to store this.

Summary:

- Explore a range of notetaking apps and decide which functions work for you.
- Develop a strategy based around your individual needs and way of working.
- Think about how your notes will be organised and stored for easy access and recalling information quickly.
- Process your notes so that you can see key points on each page at a glance.

Further reading:

To learn more about making effective notes, you can access further resources on the Skills Hub.

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