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My Learning Essentials



Study strategies for success

CHEAT SHEET

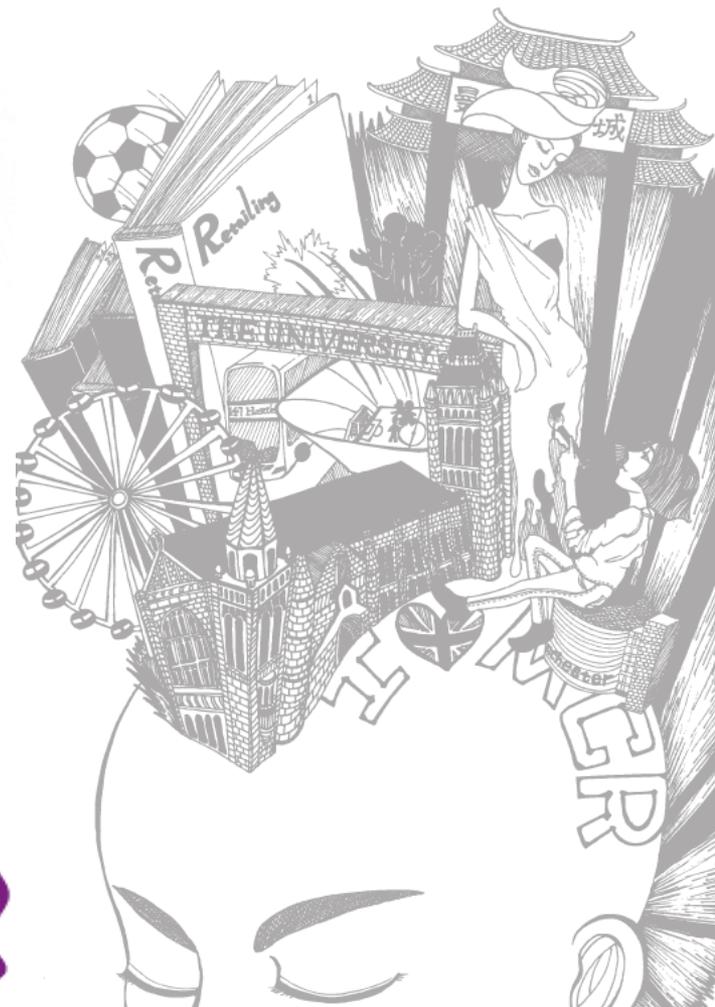


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<https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/learning-objects/mle/study-strategies>



Blackboard
CATALYST AWARD
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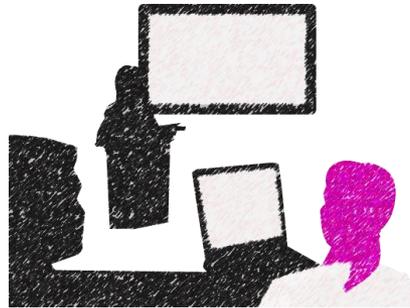


Overview

There are a number of strategies you can use to become a more effective student. We'll look at a few different ones you can use in these situations:



Note taking



Lectures



Revision

Note taking

Do you find that your notes don't include the facts you need to revise



Try strategy 1:
THEME

Are your notes too extensive to use for revision or understanding



Try strategy 2:
CONNECT

All students would benefit from trying strategy 3:

INTERACT

Note taking strategy 1: **THEME**

Strategy overview:

The Flowchart, Timeline, or KWL chart. If you find yourself only writing down major themes, and missing out on the details, it might be time to reorganise your notes to emphasise the building blocks that go into the major themes.

1. Take a major theme or idea you have drawn out of the reading and break it down chronologically. When did the idea first appear? What were the steps that led you to understand it as a grander theme? Write down at least three detailed pieces of evidence that can back up the conclusions.
2. Got an important event? What were the smaller events that led up to it? Can you name all of the key participants and the dates when they became involved?
3. Create a KWL chart. "KWL" stands for "Know/Want to Know/Learned" and lets you map out what you already know, what you need to look up and what you've learned from the process. Make a list of the things you already know, make a separate list of the questions you need to answer to understand the detail on each of those topics. As you go through your notes, reading and other resources, add to the "L" column what you have learned.

Note taking strategy 2: **CONNECT**

Strategy overview:

Mindmapping (or spider mapping) is a note-taking technique that emphasise the connections between details and ideas. It is extremely flexible and can be colour-coded and annotated to add further depth to the notes.

1. Mindmapping can be used to visually connect information. Try colour-coding ideas that have similar qualities or details that link to broader themes. Create icons that represent large ideas that connect details.
2. When mind-mapping, make connections between abstract ideas and concrete examples. Try to have three or four details that draw from or build up the idea.
3. Check out mindmapping software such as Freeplane, MindGenius or Inspiration. Freeplane is free; the other two are available at computer clusters on campus. Often the software can swap between a mindmap and more traditional outline notes, if that would help you revise.

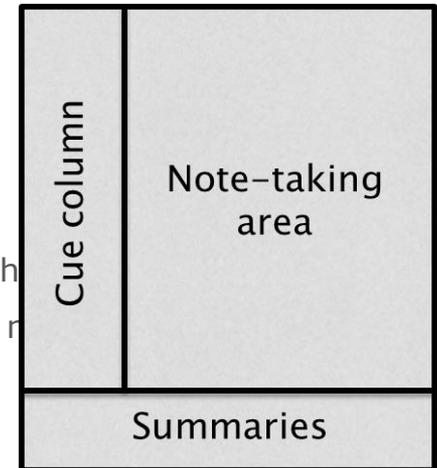
Note taking strategy 3: INTERACT

Strategy overview:

No matter how you take notes, the Cornell Note system can improve them. Cornell Notes are a system that allows you to take notes in the format that suits you and encourages both interaction and checks for understanding.

1. This system divides your page into three sections:

- A. The section on the right is your main note-taking area.
- B. Use the left hand column to ask yourself questions to deepen your understanding. What connections can you between your notes on the
- C. The summary section at the bottom is a very concise review of the r
this page.



- 2. Illustrate/graph/colour code the information on the page in the left hand column. Make your connections visual.
- 3. Remember, the summary only summarises what is on the page above it. It is to check you understand that topics on that page; don't be tempted to add in details from other pages!

Lectures

Do you find that lectures move too quickly for you to keep up



Try strategy 1:
PREPARE

Do you feel unsure about what you've learned from a lecture until you've spoken with someone about it



Try strategy 2:
DISCUSS

All students would benefit from trying strategy 3:

SUMMARISE

Lectures strategy 1: **PREPARE**

Strategy overview:

Lectures go too quickly? Get ready early! Prepare yourself so that it is simpler to see the connections and points the lecturer will make.

1. If available, get a copy of the slides ahead of time and create an outline of what you can expect from the lecture. Use this outline as a template to write notes for the lecture.
2. Seek out, and read, information on the topic being addressed. Check out reading lists via the Library and prepare some notes on what may be discussed.
3. Read ahead: be one lecture ahead and see if you can spot where the topic is heading next.

Lectures strategy 2: **DISCUSS**

Strategy overview:

Feel like you're not sure what happened until after you get a chance to interact with the information? Find a place to "talk" about it.

1. Re-focus your notes: develop questions instead of trying to record facts. Write down further areas for study or areas that you will want to look into later. Make your notes plans for what you will do next.
2. Find someone who will listen: hand your notes or the slides to a friend and have them chat with you about the lecture. What did you hear that you didn't write down? What connections can you make?
3. Annotate the slides: use mindmapping or other techniques to annotate the slides for the lectures. Have a conversation with the information. Challenge yourself to come up with three questions and areas for further investigation for each topic addressed during lecture.

Lectures strategy 3: **SUMMARISE**

Strategy overview:

To fast? Need to interact with the information? Either way, a summary will help you out! Being able to summarise is an excellent way to check you are understanding what you are learning.

1. Challenge yourself to summarise, in three sentences or fewer, the key theme of the lecture.
2. Take a series of slides and summarise what connects them and how they may impact each other.
3. Take the key points from the lecture and link them to a summary of the secondary reading for that topic. How does what you've learned connect to the bigger picture?

Revision

Do you sometimes struggle to explain your understanding of a topic, or to articulate the details



Try strategy 1:
COMMUNICATE

Do you feel you can't move on until you completely understand a topic?
Do you get stuck and run out of time?



Try strategy 2:
PRIORITISE

All students would benefit from trying strategy 3:

MONITOR

Revision strategy 1: **COMMUNICATE**

Strategy overview:

Remember, exams don't mark you on what you know, they mark you on how well you communicate what you know. If you find yourself struggling to articulate how and why you understand a topic, focus on practicing to communicate your understanding.

1. Create a mock presentation on a topic. Could you explain the concepts to a group of fellow students? To a friend outside of the degree programme? To a stranger? Test your understanding (and figure out what you need to focus on) by creating a presentation.
2. Draw out the details. Start with what you know and break it down until you can no longer accurately fill in the details. Spend some time researching until you are confident you can show the process of your understanding from beginning to end.
3. Check out the slides from lectures. Can you arrange them in broader themes? Can you annotate them with details from secondary reading? Can you pick a few at random and speak about the ideas they describe?

Revision strategy 2: **PRIORITISE**

Strategy overview:

Create a broad outline of the tasks and topics you need to successfully revise. Students who focus too early on the details often find they have missed key elements of revision.

1. Divide your revision timetable up into “crucial” vs “additional” areas. Try to group ideas and topics into broader themes so that you can revise similar topics at once and focus on the connections between the details.
2. Go back through your notes, colour code connecting ideas and add any additional information or detail you have.
3. Summarise, summarise, summarise. Can you discuss the entire concept? Can you link up topics and themes and use detail to support them?

Revision strategy 3: MONITOR

Strategy overview:

Use your syllabus to make a checklist. Often, courses come with a timetable or syllabus that shows what topics will be discussed at each lecture. Use this timetable to track the content that was covered and double check you are revising effectively.

1. Take the syllabus and create a chart that outlines the topics covered. Under each topic, list what you will need to revise to understand it.
2. Take the topics from the syllabus and group them by theme or some other connection. Spend time trying to understand what connects all of the ideas into the entire module. (Now would be a good time to think about additional reading as well!)
3. Turn the syllabus into a checklist. It will help you make sure that you're not missing out on any topics that will be covered during exams and may help you figure out what to include in final writing assignments.

My Learning Essentials

Now what?



FURTHER SUPPORT FROM MY LEARNING ESSENTIALS

We have workshops and online resources in a wide variety of areas, including writing skills, organising your work and finding information.

Our workshops and drop-in skills clinics are held at various times throughout the academic year; our online resources are available at all times.



[Visit the My Learning Essentials webpages to find out more.](#)



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Related resources

1. Get a grip: understanding your task
2. Being critical
3. Original thinking allowed: avoiding plagiarism

