

Make a note of this

Your memory can be fallible so be sure to have a clear, well-written record, writes Nicola Davies

Taking notes can feel tedious at work or in learning environments. Many people avoid it altogether and rely on their memory.

However, memory is fallible and as far back as 1880, the philosopher Hermann Ebbinghaus established that we forget 80 per cent of information within 24 hours.

Fortunately, we can have some control over the retention of information by adopting techniques that can enhance our memories.

Good note-taking should begin before entering the classroom or workplace. Before starting to write, it is important to concentrate on listening.

There are several techniques that will improve listening: look directly at the speaker, watch body language, and avoid distracting thoughts and environments. Maintain concentration by repeating the speaker's words in your mind.

Compiling notes

When it comes to writing notes, the following methods can be helpful in compiling a resource that will be usable at a later date:

- ▶ Always start a new class or working day on a new page. Write the date at the top and number the pages. Leave plenty of space in case you need to add further notes.
- ▶ Make notes brief, but do take time to comment on difficulties or challenges that can be referred to at a later date.

- ▶ Develop a system of shorthand and abbreviations, or use an established system such as the Cornell method.

The Cornell note-taking system is a way of taking, condensing and organising notes. A number of steps is followed.

First, the paper is ruled with a 6cm margin on the left and a 15cm margin on the right. The right-hand margin is used for making notes – spaces can be left between sections for later additions. For every significant section, a cue word can be written in the left-hand margin, and these can be used to identify the required section at a later date.

Other systems of note-taking include the outline, mapping, charting and sentence methods.



Making notes is of little value unless they are legible. Review them within 24-hours, edit them in a different coloured pen and consider typing them. Finally, keep notes safe and at hand.

Remember that making notes is important in terms of protecting patients and yourself. A well-written and accurate patient record

helps to provide consistent patient care by different professionals.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) code of conduct asserts that nurses must keep clear and accurate records of any discussions, assessments, treatments and their effectiveness.

The NMC provides the following guidelines on record-keeping:

- ▶ Complete records as soon as possible after an event.
- ▶ Never tamper with original records.
- ▶ Ensure that entries are legibly signed, dated and timed.
- ▶ Ensure that records are kept securely.

The pressure and responsibility to keep accurate and timely notes in an often hectic clinical environment can feel burdensome, but honing your note-taking skills should assist your working day.

Your notes will feel far from burdensome when the time comes for them to be used at a later date **NS**

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RESOURCE FILE

- ▶ Note-taking systems
<http://tiny.cc/cornellnote>
- ▶ NMC record-keeping guidance
<http://snipurl.com/nmcrecords>