UnCodemy

How to Make Handwritten Notes That Score PDF

Handwritten notes help you score when they are short, structured and built for revision, not copied from the textbook. Use a fixed page layout such as the Cornell method, write in your own words, keep one page of key formulas and diagrams per topic, use two or three colours with fixed meanings, and turn each page into questions you test yourself on every week.

Key takeaways

- Notes are for revision; if you cannot revise a unit from them in under an hour, they are too long.
- Writing in your own words forces understanding, which is why it often helps more than copying.
- A fixed layout (cue column, notes area, summary) makes notes faster to make and to revise.
- Self-testing from your notes, not re-reading them, is what improves exam recall.
- Keep a separate formula and diagram sheet per subject for the last-week revision.

Why handwritten notes still work

Typing is fast, but speed is the problem: it makes it easy to copy everything without thinking. Writing by hand is slower, so you have to choose what matters and say it in your own words. Research on note-taking, including a well-known 2014 study by Mueller and Oppenheimer, found that students who took notes by hand often did better on conceptual questions than those who typed notes word for word. The lesson is not "pens are magic". It is that processing ideas into your own words helps learning.

For B.Tech exams, handwritten notes also match the exam itself. You will write answers, derivations and diagrams by hand, so practising that format pays off.

What good exam notes look like

Good notes are:

- **Short:** a unit of a subject in 6 to 12 pages, not 40.
- **Structured:** the same layout every time, so your eye knows where to look.
- **In your own words:** definitions you can say aloud without reading.
- **Visual:** diagrams, flowcharts, tables and labelled sketches.
- **Testable:** they contain questions you can quiz yourself with.

The Cornell layout (adapted for engineering)

Divide each page into three parts:

Area	Width or position	What goes there
Cue column	Left, about a quarter of the page	Keywords, likely exam questions, formula names
Notes area	Right, the main part	Definitions, steps, derivations, diagrams, examples
Summary	Bottom, 4 to 5 lines	The topic in 2 to 3 sentences plus the one formula or idea to remember

When revising, cover the notes area and use the cue column to test yourself. Say the answer, then check.

How to make notes, step by step

1. **Before class or before studying a topic,** skim the syllabus line and the headings in your textbook. Know what you are looking for.
2. **During the lecture,** write rough notes fast. Do not aim for neat.
3. **Same day or next day,** make the clean version. Use the textbook or reference to fill gaps. This is where learning happens.
4. **Write the cue column** with 3 to 6 questions that could come in the exam.
5. **Write the summary** at the bottom of each topic.
6. **Add page numbers and a unit index** at the start of the notebook.

If you missed classes, use the syllabus, the recommended textbook and previous years' papers to decide what to cover.

Formats for different types of content

Definitions and theory

- Write the definition in one or two lines.
- Add a bullet list of key points, advantages, disadvantages or types.
- Add one real example.

Derivations and numericals

- Write the given conditions and assumptions first.
- Number every step, with a short note on why the step is valid.
- Box the final result.
- Add one solved numerical in exam style with units.

Algorithms and code

- Write the idea in two lines, then pseudocode, not full code.
- Do a small dry run on a tiny example in a table.
- Note time and space complexity in the cue column.

Diagrams and circuits

- Draw them large and label every part.
- Add a two-line explanation of how it works next to the diagram.
- Practise drawing it from memory at least twice.

Comparisons

- Use a table: "Difference between X and Y" questions are common in university exams.

A simple colour code

Pick two or three colours and never change their meaning:

- **Black or blue:** main content
- **Red:** definitions, formulas and final results
- **Green:** examples, exam tips and "frequently asked" marks

More colours slow you down and add no value. Highlighters are optional; use them only for things you must memorise.

Make a one-page sheet per unit

At the end of each unit, make a single page with:

- All formulas with variable meanings
- Key diagrams in small form
- Top 5 likely questions from previous papers
- Common mistakes you made in practice

These sheets become your last-day revision pack.

Use your notes the right way

Re-reading notes feels productive but gives weak results. A large review of study methods by Dunlosky and colleagues in 2013 rated practice testing and spaced practice among the most useful techniques, and re-reading and highlighting among the least. So:

- **Self-test:** cover the notes, read the cue question, answer aloud or on rough paper.
- **Space it out:** review each unit one day, one week and three weeks after making it.
- **Practise papers:** use your notes only after attempting previous years' questions, to check and fill gaps.

A weekly routine

Day	Task
Lecture days	Rough notes in class, clean notes the same evening (30 to 45 minutes)
Saturday	Self-test on everything from this week using the cue column

Day	Task
Sunday	Quick review of last week's and last month's units; update the one-page sheets

Thirty to forty-five minutes a day is enough when it is regular.

Digital or paper?

Both work if you follow the same method. Paper is cheap and distraction-free. A tablet with a stylus lets you search, reorder and back up pages. If you use a tablet, keep the same layout and colour rules, and turn off notifications while studying.

Whatever you choose, scan or photograph paper notes at the end of each unit so you never lose them.

A quick checklist for every notes page

- Topic title and date at the top
- Cue column with at least three questions
- Definitions in your own words
- At least one diagram, table or example
- Formulas in red with variable meanings
- Summary of two to three lines at the bottom
- Page number added to the unit index

Mistakes to avoid

- Copying the textbook word for word
- Spending more time decorating pages than understanding topics
- Making notes but never testing yourself from them
- Writing notes for topics never asked in exams while skipping frequently asked ones
- Keeping notes for different subjects in one notebook with no index

Start small this week

Do not try to rewrite a whole semester of notes at once. Pick one subject, make clean Cornell-style notes for this week's lectures only, and test yourself from them on the weekend. If it works, add a second subject next week. A method you actually use beats a perfect method you abandon after three days.

Frequently asked questions

Are handwritten notes better than typed notes?

Handwritten notes often help understanding because you have to summarise in your own words. Typed or tablet notes also work if you follow the same method and test yourself.

How long should my notes be for one unit?

Aim for about 6 to 12 pages per unit, plus a one-page summary sheet. If you cannot revise a unit in under an hour, the notes are too long.

What is the Cornell note-taking method?

It divides each page into a cue column for keywords and questions, a main notes area, and a short summary at the bottom. You revise by covering the notes and answering from the cues.

Should I use many colours in my notes?

Use two or three colours with fixed meanings, such as one for content, one for formulas and one for examples. More colours slow you down.

How do I revise from my notes effectively?

Test yourself instead of re-reading: cover the notes, answer the cue questions, then check. Review each unit after one day, one week and a few weeks.

Is this PDF free?

Yes. Fill in the short form on this page and the PDF downloads right away.

Sources and further reading

- Mueller and Oppenheimer (2014), The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard, Psychological Science
- Dunlosky et al. (2013), Improving Students' Learning With Effective Learning Techniques
- Cornell University Learning Strategies Center: the Cornell note-taking system
- Roediger and Karpicke (2006), Test-Enhanced Learning, Psychological Science

About this PDF

Prepared by the Uncodemy career team from the public sources listed. We update it every January. Corrections: info@uncodemy.com.

More free resources and courses: uncodemy.com | info@uncodemy.com | +91 98183 66550