

Teaching and Learning Handouts

Most teachers see the value of providing handouts to accompany lectures and a survey of the literature by Donald Bligh ([What's the use of lectures?](#) 2000: page 154) indicated that 'on balance, it pays to give handouts', but there is often confusion and disagreement about what sort of handout should be provided and when. Increasingly when we talk about 'handouts' we do not mean a pile of paper copies handed out in a lecture, but resources delivered electronically. This page outlines various purposes of handouts in an attempt to answer some of the questions about when and how handouts should be provided, what should be in them and what impact they have on student learning. There are more links to external resources on [handouts](#) in the TLDU collection of [web links](#).

The purposes of handouts.

Handouts are a useful supplement to face-to-face sessions and can support further learning in non-contact hours. They can offer important scaffolding for learning by providing an outline, summary of main points, conclusions, questions posed by the material, questions frequently asked by students (FAQs) and links to other lectures.

In the lecture, well-focused handouts can save students spending all their time copying and let them concentrate on understanding the material. This can avoid transcription errors and provide clear versions of diagrams or complicated slides, definitions and accurate spellings of new terminology. International students and those with disabilities or learning difficulties for whom extensive note-taking is hard, find such handouts particularly useful.

Scaffolding handouts can also help to clarify expectations during the lecture, including information on what students should learn/be able to do as a result of the lecture (learning outcomes) and details of tasks or questions to be tackled during the session. They can encourage focused [note-making](#) by leaving specific spaces for students to add notes which make sense of the material in their own words, or make connections to other learning.

After the lecture, handouts can provide specific references or point to sources of additional information. In a handout, you can give references for the sources used in the lecture, detail the most important readings, highlight which extracts are most relevant and include useful web addresses or point students to sections of the Study Direct site.

Handouts can also be used to set tasks or pose questions for work after the lecture and/or in a related seminar. They are also likely to be a significant revision resource for students so it can be particularly helpful to include questions for use as checklist during revision.

Different styles of handout

The range of functions that handouts can serve suggests that different formats may be appropriate. These are just a few examples of types of handouts that may help you to decide what form might be best for each of your lectures. Although many people use PowerPoint to produce handouts you may find that a word.doc will offer more options.

Skeleton handouts provide a bare outline of the lecture structure with some key statements and main references and can be produced on one side of A4. This can be a useful aid to student note-making and helps students to follow the structure of the lecture.

Gapped handouts provide a more complete account of the lecture, but to keep students active, miss out carefully chosen sections. Examples which work well include axes of graphs, key stages in mathematical proofs, dates or labels on diagrams. Notes achieved this way can be personalised by individual students but they also give them time to listen and think rather than copying all the time. Students (especially those with dyslexia or for whom English is not their first language) can find gapped handouts challenging if you continue speaking and just expect them to spot the gaps, complete them and keep listening so it is better to use the gaps as an opportunity to pause and allow the students to concentrate.

Key information handouts could just include key information such as complex diagrams, maps, formulae, quotations and references. These handouts ensure key information is not missed or copied incorrectly and help with note-taking whilst allowing the lecturer more flexibility in the flow of the lecture.

When and how to provide handouts

Handouts should be made available in advance so that students can use them to prepare for the lecture and then annotate them during the session. Uploading handouts as files to the relevant section of the course Study Direct site is probably the most efficient way to publish them as they will be easily found and available later for revision.

You will want your handouts to be accessible to all your students and JISC have created some online resources that offer guidance on [Writing Accessible Electronic Documents with Microsoft Word](#) which will help you to ensure that your materials can be read by all your students. Alternatively, pdf files can be very accessible and there is [guidance on the Adobe website](#) on creating accessible materials in that format.

Students creating handouts

When students are giving presentations they may be required or advised to provide handouts for their audience or as part of an assessment process. To support them in this, you can find student-focused guidance on [handouts, notes and visual aids](#) in the [presentations](#) section of the [Study Success at Sussex \(S3\)](#) website and some external links on [presentation handouts](#) in the [TLDU web links](#).