

Good Note Taking Skills

Good note taking is more than just writing down information. It also involves organizing that information and reviewing it. Psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus determined that if we do not review what we learn, we quickly forget information- about 56% in one hour, 66% after one day, and 75% after six days. That's why good note taking skills are so important for academic success.

Let's look at note taking in 3 phases:

1. Organizing
2. Recording
3. Reviewing

ORGANIZING

- Use a 3-ring binder instead of a spiral notebook. A binder is better because you can keep your syllabus and handouts in the binder with your notes. This also gives you the ability to remove your notes and spread them out. Use a separate binder for each class.
- Take notes only on one side of the paper so you can take them out and place them side-by-side for review.
- Read the assigned chapters BEFORE you go to class. This will make you familiar with the material before the instructor lectures on it. It's easier to take good notes when you've seen the material ahead of time.
- Right before class, try to review your notes from the previous lecture so you can tie today's lecture to what you have already learned.
- Talk with your instructor to clarify any unclear information from the previous class period.
- Decide how to arrange your notes.
 - One method is to use an outline format, aligning the main point to the left and indenting for any supporting information. If you look at this handout, it uses an outline format.
 - Another method is the Cornell System of Note Taking. A horizontal line is drawn across the bottom of the page, leaving a 2" section at the bottom. Then, a line is drawn down the left side of the paper, leaving about a 2' margin along the left.

The main section is for taking your notes. Then along the left, you place key words to convey main points. This section is for you to use to test yourself on the information by covering the main part of your notes and trying to recall the information based on the key words in the left margin. At the bottom, you summarize the ideas on the page in your own words. See the end of this handout for an example of the Cornell System.

- Keep a variety of different color pens and highlighters to allow yourself to color-code your notes. For example, you can highlight definitions in one color, important dates in another, names in another, etc. This helps you more easily find specific information from your notes.
- Get with another conscientious student in the class and arrange to share notes.

RECORDING

- Sit where you can see and hear without distraction.
- Be sure to put a date on each day's notes.
- Don't crowd your notes. Leave gaps to allow you to add information later and leave your margins wide so you can jot extra ideas along the sides.
- Ask the instructor or a classmate to help you fill in any gaps in your notes if you think you missed one or two important points.
- If you write something in your notes incorrectly, just cross it out. Trying to erase it takes up more time and may cause you to miss important information. Go back later and make sure that the incorrect information has been clearly marked out so you don't use it.
- Take as many notes as you can. It is better to have more information than you need than to not have enough.
- Use abbreviations and symbols to save yourself time. Create your own or use standard ones- just be sure you are consistent in how you use them and that they only have one meaning. If necessary, create a legend so you remember what each abbreviation or symbol means.
- Write notes in your own words as much as you can- this forces you to process the information you are receiving from the instructor. However, certain things like definitions, formulas, and quotes should be written exactly as given.
- Listen for more than just facts- try to understand the big picture. We remember more information if we understand how it all works together.

- **Draw charts and diagrams in your notes to help you understand ideas and concepts. These can be copied from the instructor or made up on your own to reinforce what the instructor has taught.**
- **Be an active listener so you notice your instructor's cues that identify important information to capture. Here are some examples of such cues:**
 - **When they slow down or change the pitch of their voice to emphasize an important point.**
 - **When their body language expresses extra feeling about an idea, such as gesturing or pointing.**
 - **When they give examples.**
 - **When they use numbers, dates or statistics**
 - **When they present information in the form of a list, such as "these 5 steps" or "the four major causes" or "the top 10 reasons" etc.**
 - **When they emphasize something by writing it on the board.**
 - **When they repeat an item.**
 - **When they ask if everyone understands.**
 - **When they make a direct reference to the book.**
 - **When they outright tell you that something is important or that it will be on the test.**
- **Include stories or anecdotes the instructor shares, but only if it helps you better understand the material.**
- **Don't spend so much time and focus trying to write down everything on the slide that you miss the point the instructor is making.**
- **Actively participate in the class by asking questions, taking part in discussions, etc. Being engaged in the class helps you retain the material discussed. Just be sure not to dominate the discussions or monopolize the class time with excessive questions. If you have a lot of questions, meet with the instructor after class rather than taking up valuable lecture time.**
- **Use an audio recorder or phone app to record lectures- but do not rely on the recordings to take the place of taking notes. Use the audio to clarify lecture points or to help you fill gaps in your notes.**
- **Take a photo of a slide that contains complex diagrams or too much information to write down. Use that photo for the purpose of adding the material to your notes later.**
- **Set aside personal bias and listen to the content of the speaker's message.**
- **Don't be shy! If you missed a point or need some clarification, ask the instructor before you leave or see them during office hours.**

REVIEWING

- Review your notes after class- the sooner the better.
- Use the margins and gaps in your notes to fill in omitted points, correct errors, write key words, and add information from your text book or other related sources.
- As you read your notes, underline, highlight or mark important points that you want to give extra attention to later when you study.
- Should you recopy your notes? Some students benefit from rewriting their notes. However, be sure to leave time to actually study and think about your notes. Experiment and find out what works best for you.
- Practice reciting the information in your notes.
- Talk with other student about the lecture- you'll be surprised at the points they noticed that you didn't!
- Connect concepts together to see their meaning in the larger picture. In other words, look at the overall scope of your notes and how it all fits together, not just seeing them as isolated thoughts.
- Conduct weekly reviews of your notes. Put it on your calendar and make it a habit.

One of the most important points about taking good notes:

Don't miss class!!!

It is very difficult to get good notes without being there. If you absolutely must miss a class, work with the instructor to get missing material/handouts, ask someone to record the lecture for you, and/or borrow a classmate's notes.

CORNELL SYSTEM OF NOTE TAKING

<p>Key Words Area</p>	<p>Main Notes Area</p>
<p>Summarize Your Notes Here</p>	