

Note Taking

Taking good notes in college is a crucial for making good grades, but unfortunately, many students have no idea how to take notes. The key to taking notes well begins with organization and preparation for class.

Listed below are several tips on taking better lecture notes. But remember, the most vital element to being a successful student is being prepared. That means read your text, handouts, whatever material you have for class. Read it, or at the very least, skim it before you go to class. That way when you take notes, the lecture material will not sound foreign and you'll be able to recognize some of the terminology.

This handout includes some very useful information about taking notes. Try some of these tips out for yourself and you'll see that when your note-taking skills improve, so will your grades.

1. Full-sized, three-ring notebooks are best for containing all lecture notes, handouts, and notes from the text and readings. Why? Pages can be arranged chronologically with pertinent handouts inserted into lecture notes for easy reference. If you miss a lecture, you can easily add the missing notes. Course materials are together in one notebook.
2. Date and number your note pages and your handouts. It will help with continuity.
3. Give yourself plenty of blank spaces in your notes, as well as plenty of room to write. This will allow you to make additional notes, sketch helpful graphics, or write textbook references. Your notes will be easier to read if you write in pen and use only one side of the paper.
4. Law-ruled or summary-margin paper is helpful with its three-inch margin on the left side of the page. If you can't find this paper, draw the margin on each piece of paper. This sets one up for using the Cornell format of note taking. Write your notes on the right side of the line. After the lecture, use the left margin for key words or phrases, or sample questions when you review the notes.

Learning is not a spectator sport.

-Anonymous

5. Take as many notes as you can. If you miss something, leave a space; you may be able to fill in the blanks later. Do not stop taking notes if you are confused or if you want to ponder a particular concept. You will have time for that later. Abbreviations are extremely helpful. Suggestions for abbreviations are listed in this section.
6. It may be difficult to make your notes look great or to have them extremely organized as you write them. Work with your notes as soon after class as possible when your recall is at its best. You may be able to fill in some blanks. Color coding can bring some organization to your notes. For example, identify concepts and categories by highlighting items with a particular color. If you still have problems organizing your notes, begin to formulate a specific question for your professor or study groups.
7. As you review your notes, look at the information as answers to questions. As these questions become more clear to you, jot down the questions in the left margin. You may also write key words or phrases in the left hand margin that cue your recall of definitions, theories, models, or examples. Now you are ready to try to recall the information in your notes. Cover the right side of your notes, leaving only these cues (whether there are questions or key words) to test yourself.
8. As you begin to put the material of the course together, add a somewhat generic question — WHY? — to your answers. You need to know why any particular answer is correct. You need to know why the information is pertinent to the course. This will also prepare you for essay exams, as well.



The Cornell Note Taking System

Recall Column

<p>----- 2 ½"----- -----6"-----</p> <p>Reduce ideas and facts to concise jottings and summaries as cues for Reciting, Reviewing, and Reflecting.</p>	<p>Record the lecture as fully and as Meaningfully as possible.</p>
<p>The format provides the perfect opportunity for following through with the 5 R's of note-taking. Here they are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Record. During the lecture, record in the main column as many meaningful facts and ideas as you can. Write legibly.2. Reduce. As soon after as possible, summarize these ideas and facts concisely in the Recall Column. Summarizing clarifies meanings and relationships, reinforces continuity, and strengthens memory. Also, it is a way of preparing for examinations gradually and well ahead of time.3. Recite. Now cover the column, using only your jottings in the Recall Column as cues or "flags" to help you recall, say over facts and ideas of the lecture as fully as you can, not mechanically, but in your own words and with as much appreciation of the meaning as you can. Then, uncovering your notes, verify what you have said. This procedure helps to transfer the facts and ideas of your long term memory.4. Reflect. Reflective students distill their opinions from their notes. They make such opinions the starting point for their own musings upon the subjects they are studying. Such musings aid them in making sense out of their courses and academic experiences by finding relationships among them. Reflective students continually label and index their experiences and ideas, put them into structures, outlines, summaries, and frames of reference. They rearrange and file them. Best of all, they have an eye for the vital-for the essential. Unless ideas are placed in categories, unless they are taken up from time to time for re-examination, they will become inert and soon forgotten.5. Review. If you will spend 10 minutes every week or so in a quick review of these notes, you will retain most of what you have learned, and you will be able to use your knowledge currently to greater and greater effectiveness.	
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Writing down every word your professor says is impossible. Part of learning good note-taking skills is being able to determine the most important points of the lecture. A lot of students develop their own shorthand for taking notes. If you haven't been able to do that yet, the Eight Ways to Abbreviate below should help you get started.

Eight Ways to Abbreviate

1. *Symbols and graphics*

= equal	* important	> greater than	≠ does not equal
** very important	< less than	& and	# number
\$ cost, money	w/ with	w/o with out	vs versus, against
(), { }, [] = information that belongs together			

2. *Abbreviations (don't worry about punctuation)*

cf = compare	eg = for example	dept = department	NYC = New York City
mx = maximum	mn = minimum		

3. *Use only the first syllable of the word*

pol = politics	dem = democracy	lib = liberal
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4. *Use the first syllable and only the first letter of the second*

subj = subject	cons = conservative
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5. *Eliminate the final letters; just use enough to recognize the abbreviation*

assoc = association	biol = biology	rep = repetition	intro = introduction
concl = conclusion	info = information		

6. *Omit vowels from the middle to words*

bkgd = background	pprd = prepared	estmt = estimate	gov = governor
rdng = reading	orgnsm = organism		

7. *Use apostrophes:*

gov't = government	am't = amount	cont'd = continued
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8. *Form a plural of a symbol by adding "s":*

co-ops = cooperatives	libs = liberals	/s = ratios
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Note Cards

Creating and using note cards can alleviate anxiety about remembering facts throughout an academic term as well as provide a portable study tool. An additional advantage of using note cards is to present written information out of sequence. This strategy will help you learn the information free of association to the information it proceeds and follows.

Procedure

1. 3 x 5 cards can hold important information from notes and reading. Write the cue or question on one side of the card and write the definition, description or answer on the other side.
2. Begin compiling the cards early in the term. Carry the cards with you and review the information many times during the day and evening.
3. The information that does not come to mind readily can be reviewed more often or placed in a "critical" stack. Repetition is the best way to learn the material.

