

NOTE TAKING - THE CORNELL SYSTEM

The Cornell system for taking notes is designed to save time but yet be highly efficient. There is no rewriting or retyping of your notes. It is a "DO IT RIGHT IN THE FIRST PLACE" system.

1. First Step - PREPARATION

Use a large, loose-leaf notebook. Use only one side of the paper, (you then can lay your notes out to see the direction of a lecture.) Draw a vertical line 2 1/2 inches from the left side of you paper. This is the recall column. Notes will be taken to the right of this margin. Later key words or phrases can be written in the recall column.

2. Second Step - DURING THE LECTURE

Record notes in paragraph form. Capture general ideas, not illustrative ideas. Skip lines to show end of ideas or thoughts. Using abbreviations will save time. Write legibly.

3. Third Step - AFTER THE LECTURE

Read through your notes and make it more legible if necessary. Now use the column. Jot down ideas or key words which give you the idea of the lecture. (REDUCE) You will have to reread the lecturer's ideas and reflect in your own words. Cover up the right-hand portion of your notes and recite the general ideas and concepts of the lecture. Overlap your notes showing only recall columns and you have your review.

EDITING LECTURE NOTES

1. There are several good reasons for organizing and reviewing your notes as soon as possible after the lecture.

A. While the lecture is still fresh in your mind, you can fill in from memory examples and facts which you did not have time to write down during the lecture. More over, you can recall what parts of the lecture were unclear to you so that you can consult the lecturer, the graduate assistant, a classmate, your text, or additional readings for further information.

B. Immediately review results in better retention than review after a longer period of time. Unless a student reviews within 24 hours after the lecture or at least before the next lecture, his retention will drop; and he will be relearning rather than reviewing.

2. A method of annotation is usually preferable to recopying notes. The following suggestions for annotating may be helpful:

A. Underline key statements or important concepts.

B. Use asterisks or other signal marks to indicate importance.

C. Use margins or blank pages for coordinating notes with the text. Perhaps indicate relevant pages of the text beside the corresponding information in the notes.

D. Use a key and a summary.

- Use one of the margins to keep a key to important names, formulas, dates, concepts, and the like. This forces you to anticipate questions of an objective nature and provides specific facts that you need to develop essays.
- Use the other margin to write a short summary of the topics on the page, relating the contents of the page to the whole lecture or to the lecture of the day before. Condensing the notes in this way not only helps you to learn them but also prepares you for the kind of thinking required on essay exams and many so-called "objective" exams.

NOTE-TAKING AND IN-CLASS SKILLS

Adequate notes are a necessary adjunct to efficient study and learning in college. Think over the following suggestions and improve your note-taking system where needed.

Listen actively - if possible think before you write - but don't get behind.

Be open minded about points you disagree on. Don't let arguing interfere with your note-taking.

Raise questions if appropriate.

Develop and use a standard method of note-taking including punctuation, abbreviations, margins, etc.

Take and keep notes in a large notebook. The only merit to a small notebook is ease of carrying and that is not your main objective. A large notebook allows you to adequately indent and use an outline form.

Leave a few spaces blank as you move from one point to the next so that you can fill in additional points later if necessary. Your objective is to take helpful notes, not to save paper.

Do not try to take down everything that the lecturer says. It is impossible in the first place and unnecessary in the second place because not everything is of equal importance. Spend more time listening and attempt to take down the main points. If you are writing as fast as you can, you cannot be as discriminating a listener. There may be some times, however, when it is more important to write than to think.

Listen for cues as to important points, transition from one point to the next, repetition of points for emphasis, changes in voice inflections, enumeration of a series of points, etc.

Many lecturers attempt to present a few major points and several minor points in a lecture. The rest is explanatory material and samples. Try to see the main points and do not get lost in a barrage of minor points which do not seem related to each other. The relationship is there if you will listen for it. Be alert to cues about what the professor thinks is important.

Make your original notes legible enough for your own reading, but use abbreviations of your own invention when possible. The effort required to recopy notes can be better spent in rereading them and thinking about them. Although neatness is a virtue in some respect, it does not necessarily increase your learning.

Copy down everything on the board, regardless. Did you ever stop to think that every blackboard scribble may be a clue to an exam item? You may not be able to integrate what is on the board into your lecture notes, but if you copy it, it may serve as a useful clue for you later. If not, what the heck -- you haven't wasted anything. You were in the classroom anyway.

Sit as close to the front of the class, there are fewer distractions and it is easier to hear, see and attend to important material.

Get assignments and suggestions precisely - ask questions if you're not sure.

Listening Skills

1. Taking good notes really begins with good listening skills. You can show up to class with a gold plated notebook, an ink pen that writes with golden ink, and highlighters that read the material back to you (they may invent that one later on), but without listening actively, you will not be able to take good notes.

Becoming a successful college student includes developing a method of taking and using notes that works for you.

2. **Do any of these apply to you?**

Although I listen to my instructors, I often do not remember what they say.

Even when I study hard, I can do poorly on exams.

I have a good memory, but I would like to make it even better.

I use memory games to help me remember important information.

I think that mnemonic devices will help me remember more of what I study.

Listening is a process that involves sensing, interpreting, evaluating, and reacting to spoken messages. You will need good listening skills in order to take good notes—especially for those boring classes that may involve a lot of lecture and notetaking!

3. Active listening really begins with physically actively listening—sit in the front of the classroom, sit up straight and tall (better for your posture anyway).
Active listening involves asking questions to clarify what the instructor is saying; or, if you don't like to ask questions in class, predicting what the instructor will say next.
Active listening involves relating the new lecture material with previous notes or with material you already know.
Active listening involves interpreting what the instructor says and rewriting it in your own words.
4. Hearing is sensing spoken messages from their source. Listening involves a complex process of communication. Successful listening occurs when the listener understands the speaker's intended message.
5. Be aware of distractions to active listening
6. Prepare before you come to class. Look over the last previous class notes; keep up with required outside reading; think about how the material relates to you and/or what you already know about it.
7. Think positively about what you're listening to. Respond appropriately to the instructor's lecture.
8. Think about what non-verbal cues you are relaying to the instructor. Do you look like you're listening intently? When asking a relevant question, provide a reference point for your instructor so they will answer your question more directly.

9. Be aware of verbal signposts—signals from your instructor that what they are about to say is very important and will be on the test. Signals such as: For example, Specifically, The result is, A critical point in the process involves. Be aware of the instructor's body language.
10. Develop a successful note taking system. Notes that are well organized are easier to understand and easier to review. Choose a system that works with your personal learning style. If you're a visual learner, translate your lecture notes into a mind map or graph.
11. Many of you take notes using the Running Text method where you are simply writing while the instructor is lecturing. You may need to use abbreviations—you will have to be selective about what you write, and what to leave out.
12. Some of you might take notes using an outline form—this takes organization and listening at the same time and may be difficult to do while the lecture is going on. You could always take notes using the Running Text method, then transfer them into an outline.
13. You could even write an informal outline of your lecture notes.
14. You can combine the different methods; fold your paper different ways—whatever works for you. The bottom line is, however, find a system that will organize your notes and, most importantly, keep you actively listening during a class lecture.
15. Even if you use Commercial Notes, a tape recorder, or borrowed notes, you are shortchanging yourself. Using these will not force you to listen actively. Also, taking notes by actually writing down the material further reinforces your memorization of the material presented.
16. What do you see when you get all of your lecture notes together?
17. Do these notes look like some of yours? World Civ notes?
18. If you have terrible handwriting like I do, type your lecture notes when you get back home. This will further reinforce your memorization.
19. Re-read your notes within 24 hours of the class. If you have a class immediately following, read over them while you're waiting for the next class to begin. Read again between classes.