

Note Taking



What should I do before class in order to take notes effectively?

What should my notes look like?

What should I write down?

What can I do to stay engaged?

What different ways can I review my notes?

How can I use my notes to study with classmates?

How can I use my notes to study for a test?

What factors affect how I take notes for a class?

Effective Note Taking

Before Class

- Read material ahead of time—it makes taking notes much easier.
- Look through the syllabus; anticipate what topics the lecture will cover.

During Class

- Avoid writing in complete sentences. Jot down only main clauses.
- Do not copy lecture verbatim. Instead, focus on main points.
- Avoid taking notes in paragraph form. Instead, make sure each point is easily identifiable.
- Write down any questions you have during lectures.
- Pay attention to the lecturer's intonation and pauses. Often such devices are used to emphasize certain points.
- Make sure to copy what the instructor writes on the board.
- Have an internal conversation with the lecturer; ask questions. This will help you stay engaged in the lecture.

After Class

- Take 10 minutes after class and before the next class session to review notes. You may choose to read, highlight, retype, rewrite, or underline. You may also consider reorganizing them.
- Recopy your notes onto a chalkboard or dry erase board, especially rewriting charts or diagrams.
- Write questions in the margin of your notes so that you can quiz yourself later.
- Read over your notes while walking or exercising.
- Role-play. Pretend you are the professor explaining materials to students. Read and explain your notes and class concepts *aloud*.
- Compare notes with a classmate. This will help solidify important concepts and fill in any gaps in your own notes.

When Studying for a Test

- Use the questions you've written in your note margins to quiz yourself on the content of your notes.

Most of all, make sure that you are doing what works best for you. Try different approaches and go with those that help you retain information. Your note-taking style may also depend upon the style which your instructor or the content is being covered, so you may adjust your method for each class.

Based on the Cornell Note-taking System. For more Information:
Pauk, Walter. How to Study in College. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001. 236-241

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