Preparing for Effective Note Taking

Writing notes during class is an important way of tracking course content, reviewing important material and guiding the learning process. But notes are much more than a written record of everything that occurs during class. Note taking is a process that starts before class and continues throughout a term. Most importantly, notes should be used regularly, in different ways and at times scheduled outside of class. Learning to take effective notes is of benefit to individuals in a variety of personal, academic and work settings.

Using organized note taking methods can help students to track information they are learning and determine how well they are learning it. An effective system of taking notes supports students to be confident that they are prepared for classroom discussions, assignments and final exams. But, how can a student ensure they are taking effective notes?

The most important feature of an effective set of notes is that students can use them to organize their approach to learning course content. Students who plan their note taking method in advance of class and pre read to consider the objective of an upcoming class will likely be more effective note takers. Students should consider how they will format notes, how they will record information and then use their notes on a regular basis. Remember that course notes will be a student’s study guide.

Use the following to help prepare to take effective class notes in university:

Before a New Term: Learn about Taking Notes.

- What are the types of note taking templates?
- How effective is your handwriting? Typing?
- What technology is available for note taking and when should it be learned?
- What is known about good note taking?
- How does note taking vary from setting-to-setting?

Before Class: Prepare to take Good Notes

- What note taking template or format should be used?
- How quickly, or in what manner does the instructor deliver course information?
- Do you have all of the writing tools you need?
- Will you need to copy word-for-word, or can you jot down key words, phrases and main ideas?
- How will you organize main topics and sub-topics?
Preparing for Effective Note Taking

During Class: Write Effective Notes

- What is the topic of an upcoming class?
- From scanning assigned readings, what are the big ideas that should be included in notes?
- What key words or questions should you write in advance of class to help you stay on track?
- What can you do if you lose focus and miss information during a class?
- What is your instructor’s purpose during this class? What are your goals for the class?
- How will you use this content to engage in weekly self-testing?

During Class: Write Effective Notes

- Where will you sit to hear the information you need to document?
- What are your objectives? Use your prepared key words and questions to keep you focused.
- What will you notice instructors do when something is important?
- What visual information is being used in class and will you record it?
- Are you able to use your current method of taking notes while also listening in class?
- Are you understanding what you are writing?

After Class: Review, Organize, and Use Notes

- Can you connect with a classmate to compare notes?
- Do your notes allow you to easily prioritize and organize information?
- Do your notes provide you with an outline of the most important information with a list of specific related resources?
- Is your study process effective, in part, due to your notes?
- Did you write down information that you didn’t need? Because students should spend the most time reviewing the most complex or important content, plan to avoid writing unnecessary notes.
- Are you able to create test questions using material from your notes?
- Use study strategies and time management tools to manage how notes are used.
- Review notes more frequently, but in shorter time periods. Paper notes should look used by the end of a term!
- After reviewing your notes each week, carry over unlearned content to the next week.

References

- Note taking image retrieved from www.pixabay.com CC0 Public Domain Free for commercial use. No attribution required.
## Sample Note Taking Method using the Cornell Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cues ↓</th>
<th>Date: _______________</th>
<th>Course: _____________ Page ___ of ___</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Before class: Predict class objectives and main ideas using course syllabus and assigned readings. Note 3-5 main ideas here in a key word or question format.

### During Class: Record main ideas as notes in this column

**Possible ways of recording information:**

1. **Main Idea:**
   - a) Sub topic
   - b) Sub topic
   - c) Sub topic
   - d) Sub topic
   - e) Sub topic

2. **Main Idea**
   - a) Sub topic
   - b) Sub topic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Different</td>
<td>Equal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Page 64

3. **Main Idea**

*Important:*

How will this relate to the assignment due Oct. 30\textsuperscript{th}?

Tutor or SI for this?

Idea 1 \rightarrow cause

Idea 2 \rightarrow cause (disclaimer…) Formula: A=B+C2

### After Class: Create questions based on course content and incorporate these study questions into your weekly study routine.

### After Class: Summarize the class in a few sentences here. Pretend a classmate has missed class and is asking you to explain what occurred in class today. What would you tell them in one minute?

### Questions: Write follow-up questions for professors or tutors and note new tasks related to course content.