

Note Taking Strategies

How To Make Note Taking Effective

What's the point of taking notes during a lecture and what is the best way to do it?

- Aids comprehension & retention: Information in notes has a 34% chance of being remembered (only 5% if not in notes).¹
 - Taking notes longhand is more effective in retention and understanding than typing
 - Studying longhand notes allows your brain to connect material to context of class – easier recall
 - Typing allows students to take notes closer to verbatim but is done “mindlessly” leading to less true understanding²
- Lecture notes provide concise and complete outline of the most important info from class
- Lecture notes provide a gauge for what is important in the textbook
- Lecture notes can assist in maintaining attention and promote critical thinking & listening skills
- Combined with notes from reading a textbook, the two are excellent for review¹

Before Lecture – Identifying Important Information

- Read any assigned reading(s) and take notes of it prior to attending the lecture
- Will give you general overview of main ideas, secondary points, and important concepts
 - Can listen for this during the lecture
 - Better able to determine relevance of information
 - Reduces the extent to which you will need to write information during lecture
- Will help you identify unfamiliar terms and concepts – can look these up prior to lecture to minimize confusion
- Will go into lecture knowing what you find unclear or difficult – can focus on finding understanding¹

During Lecture (Format & Organize Notes)

- Begin each lecture on a new page and only write on 1 side of the paper
- Date each lecture at the start and number the pages for the lecture
- At minimum have a different notebook for each class; loose leaf paper is helpful for rearranging notes
- Use standard symbols to shorten writing: & or + (and); # (number); ? (question); ! (important); ** (remember this); / (2 ideas go together); -> (causes/leads to); up arrow (increases); down arrow (decreases)
- Use indentations or leave blank spaces to distinguish between major and minor points
- Professor refers to specific pages – record those in your notes to mark them in your text later
- Use the margins for questions, comments, notes to yourself on unclear material – can use this later when studying or when meeting with professor/tutor for clarification¹
- See *Cornell Note Taking Method* handout for a specific formatting option

During Lecture (Recording of Content)

- Record unfamiliar vocabulary and unclear ideas as completely as possible
- Record diagrams, illustrations, and/or examples provided by your professor
- Listen for verbal clues for specific information to record: “four causes of ...” “in conclusion...”
- Record previews, summaries, visual aids, repeated ideas, emphasized info, questions posed to class¹

¹ Debbie Guice Longman, and Rhonda Holt Atkinson. 2005. *College Learning and Study Skills*. Belmont, Ca: Thomson/Wadsworth.

² Mueller, Pam, and Daniel Oppenheimer. 2014. Review of *The Pen Is Mightier than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand over Laptop Note Taking*. *Psychological Science* 25 (6): 1159–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797614524581>.

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After Lecture – Review and Studying

- Frequent reviews aid your recall of information by transferring information from short-term memory to long-term memory³ (see *Spaced Practice* handout for specific example)
- Go over your notes as soon as possible after lecture
 - Fill in further facts & examples while you remember them
 - Clear up missing or confusing information
 - Mark missing or confusing information you can't clear up – utilize a tutor or your professor to clear it up¹
- Summarize the lecture in your own words
 - Aids in true understanding and remembering
 - Doing this in your own words forces you to understand what you heard and synthesize it
 - Consider writing your summary as a visual: cause and effect map, timeline, diagram, etc.¹ (see *Dual Coding* handout for examples and reasoning)
- Utilize specific study techniques to help with your review - see the following handouts for options:
 - *Spaced Practice*
 - *Dual Coding*
 - *Retrieval Practice*
 - *Elaboration*
 - *Interleaving*
 - *Concrete Examples*



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³ Winerman, Lea. 2011. "Study Smart." <https://www.apa.org>, 2011. <https://www.apa.org/gradpsych/2011/11/study-smart>.

¹ Debbie Guice Longman, and Rhonda Holt Atkinson. 2005. *College Learning and Study Skills*. Belmont, Ca: Thomson/Wadsworth.