

# 3 Steps for Taking Good Notes

There is much more involved with taking good notes than just being attentive and recording what you hear. Use these steps before, during, and after a lecture to help you increase your understanding and enhance your organization.



## STEP 1: PREPARE TO TAKE NOTES

- **Use a three ring binder.** This is often better than a spiral notebook. Put your syllabus in the front, add all handouts by date, and add additional notes as needed. Reorganize sections of notes and place them side by side to create a "big picture" view of a main point, chapter, or section.
- **Use one binder per class.** This way the notes stay organized and do not get blended with other class notes.
- **Use only one side of the paper.** This will allow you to take the notes out of the binder and place them side by side for easier review when studying.
- **Always read the chapter assigned before attending the lecture and print out any notes or slides.** This allows for better recall and familiarity of material so that you recognize important points and main ideas and record appropriately.
- **Get to class early.** You'll then have time to quickly review your notes from the previous lecture to better connect the new information about to be presented.
- **Bring questions from the reading to class.** Write down questions you have that still need to be answered. Leave space after each question to fill in the response if covered in class. If not, ask the professor during office hours for further clarification.

## STEP 2: RECORD YOUR NOTES

- **Pause first.** Think a minute about your material before you start making notes. Don't take notes just to be taking notes! Take notes that will be of real value to you when you look over them at a later date.
- **Abbreviate.** Either create your own abbreviation system or use standard ones. If you create your own make sure you are consistent in its use and that the symbols and abbreviations only have one meaning. Make sure you create a legend so that you remember what each abbreviation means.
- **Listen actively.** Be attentive and listen for your professors' cues as they...
  - highlight important main points. often they will slow down and/or changes pitch of voice to emphasize an important point;
  - give examples, numbers or list points;
  - emphasize information by stating it first then writing it on the board;
  - state "this is important"; and
  - use phrases that show relationships, summaries, conclusions, connections, comparisons and contrasting data.



- **Record general main ideas and details.** Don't write verbatim notes. Notes serve to record information for recall and should show the main points of the lecture in an organized manner so that the relationship between points and details are distinguishable.
- **Consider which note taking system is best for each course.** Review the various formats, such as Cornell, Outline, Chart, Mapping, and Sentence methods to see which fits best. Sometimes a combination can work as well.
- **Translate ideas into your own words/visuals.** However, the following are important exceptions and should be noted exactly: formulas, definitions, and specific facts.
- **Be logical.** Organize notes into some sort of logical form, perhaps chronologically.
- **Write legibly.** Notes are useless if you cannot read them later!
- **Don't be concerned with spelling/grammar.** Unless, spelling or grammar are important to the course, such as English or Foreign Languages.
- **Keep going.** If you miss a statement, write key words, skip a few spaces, and get the info later.
- **Blank space.** Don't try to use every space on the page. Leave room for coordinating your notes with the text after the lecture.
- **Date your notes and number the pages.** This will help you in case something goes missing.
- **Take accurate notes.** You should usually use your own words, but try not to change the meaning. If you quote directly from an author, quote correctly.
- **Use regularly lined paper.** Don't keep notes on oddly shaped pieces of paper, or they may go missing. Keep notes in order and in one place.



### STEP 3: REVIEW YOUR NOTES

- **Re-read your notes within 24 hours of taking them.** Students forget 50% of what they learn if they don't review within 24 hours.
- **Daily refresher.** Go back to your notes each day for maximum recall of material.
- **Weekly review:** Schedule weekly review sessions that encompasses looking at both lecture and textbook notes and reciting information by synthesizing materials.
- **Use the left-hand margin to annotate your notes.** Indicate key terms, concepts, dates, and any other important information that will help you to review for exams or write papers.
- **Use the bottom margin to write a summary of each page of notes.** Like the Cornell note taking method, summarizing can be really helpful. However, if it makes more sense, summarize at the end of one set of lecture notes. Do what works best for each class.