

Note-Taking

***A laptop computer can be a useful note-taking tool and any of the below suggestions may be adapted for use on a computer.**

1. Full-sized, three-ring notebooks are best for containing all lecture notes, handouts, and notes from the test and readings. Why? Pages can be arranged chronologically with pertinent handouts inserted into lecture notes for easy reference. If you miss a lecture, you can easily add the missing notes. Course materials are together in one notebook.
2. Date and number your note pages and your handouts. It will help with continuity.
3. Give yourself plenty of blank spaces in your notes, as well as plenty of room to write. This will allow you to make additional notes, sketch helpful graphics, or write textbook references. Your notes will be easier to read if you write in pen and use only one side of the paper.
4. Law-ruled or summary margin paper is helpful with its three-inch margin on the left side of the page. If you can't find this paper, draw the margin on each piece of paper. This sets one up for using the Cornell format of note taking. Write your notes on the right side of the line. After the lecture, use the left margin for key words or phrases, or sample questions when you review the notes.
5. Take as many notes as you can. If you miss something, leave a space; you may be able to fill in the blanks later. Do not stop taking notes if you are confused or if you want to ponder a particular concept. You will have time for that later. Abbreviations are extremely helpful.
6. It may be difficult to make your notes look great or to have them extremely organized as you write them. Work with your notes as soon after class as possible when your recall is at its best. You may be able to fill in some blanks. Color coding can bring some organization to your notes. For example, identify concepts and categories by highlighting items with a particular color. If you still have problems organizing your notes, begin to formulate a specific question for your professor or study groups.
7. As you review your notes, look at the information as answers to questions. As these questions become clearer to you, jot down the questions in the left margin. You may also write key words or phrases in the left hand margin that cue your recall of definitions, theories, models, or examples. Now you are ready to try to recall the information in your notes. Cover the right side of your notes, leaving only these clues (whether there are questions or key words) to test yourself.
8. As you begin to put the material of the course together, add a somewhat generic question—WHY?—to your answers. You need to know why a particular answer is correct. You need to know why the information is pertinent to the course. This will also prepare you for essay exams.