

A Guide to Note-Taking

Many students understand the value of attending class and taking good notes. Much of the information that will appear on the exam is disseminated in class. Going to class is the FIRST step, and probably the easiest step, toward achieving academic success. Once you have decided to attend class, there are some good habits you can acquire to increase your chances of remembering the material.

1. GO TO CLASS:

- Attend every class.
- Don't skip class just because you don't feel like going.
- Save your absences for emergencies-when you really are ill or must be out of town.

2. Use a 3-ring notebook:

- Fill it with loose leaf paper for note-taking.
- This allows you to add/subtract information as needed.

3. Prepare yourself before class:

- Do the reading assignment on the lecture topic before class so you are familiar with the subject matter, new vocabulary, etc. If nothing else, *skim* the material. Even just knowing the topic and main points will help.
- Review last lecture's notes. This provides continuity and creates the proper "mind set."
- Be on time.
- Sit near the front of the room, in the center. This reduces distractions and you are more likely to pay attention.
- Have your notebook, paper, and pencil out ready to begin taking notes.

4. Have a positive attitude:

- You will be more attentive and remember more material if you invest yourself in it to make it irrelevant.
- Find connections in your classes; in other words, find ways to make the material interesting to you personally.

5. Fine tune your listening skills and make them HABITS.

- Be able to sort out the important information from the "asides" in the lecture information.
- Don't criticize, just pay attention.
- Listen for ideas and concepts. Instructors will use details and present facts to draw the "big picture." Make sure you are looking for bigger connections and not just recording facts.
- Concentrate! Don't sit near people who talk or who are distracting to you. (Remember: front & center!)

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- Even when the material gets tough...stick with it. Keep writing, even if you don't understand. Ask questions or look over your notes with the text later, but don't stop taking notes.
- Use clues the instructor gives:
 - *note words that are spelled and defined—write them down.
 - *note repetitions and extended comments.
 - *be aware of superlatives; changes in volume of voice or speed of talking.
 - *copy down lists and drawings or diagrams.
 - *note references to text or supplemental readings.

6. When it comes to the actual note-taking:

- Do not write down every word. Develop your own form of short hand and use abbreviations.
- Don't write in complete sentences or paragraph form. This wastes valuable time.
- Write clearly so that you will be able to read and understand your notes later.
- Date and label every page of notes. This will make it easier to follow when studying.

7. After class:

- As soon as possible after class, review your notes. This only takes a few minutes. Clean them up by clarifying points, filling in any gaps, etc. See what questions you may have for the next lecture.
- Reduce major points to "cues" by identifying the key words and ideas. (You can use the Cornell Method to do this.) This is great test prep.
- Review your notes on a daily and weekly basis. Don't wait until just before the exam to study. Regular review during the semester will ensure better long term memory storage therefore reducing the time needed for your pre-exam study.
- Review last lecture's notes before each new lecture.
- Tie together what is learned from your lectures with what is learned from your assigned readings. Note discrepancies, "holes" in your understanding of concepts, etc.

**Sticking with a simple, yet effective note-taking system and study plan will help to ensure a successful academic experience while in college. **