

Note-Taking Made Easy

When should I take notes?

1. As soon as possible. During a lecture, take notes using short summary phrases in your own words. The majority of your time during a lecture should be spent **listening**, so that you get the main idea. Then you make the note. Outline form will help you keep the information organized. Most lectures only cover a few of the main points in any given section. Be prepared for overlap.
2. When reading a text: have your notebook open and ready. Read a section of the text. Summarize the main points and write them down. Write any questions that you have that are not answered in the text. Sometimes the answers come in a later section, but sometimes the professor will provide the answers. Make sure to have the reading done **before** the lecture in which the material is presented.

How do I know what is important enough to write down in lecture?

1. Verbal cues: pauses, direct statements like “This is important,” and such phrasing as “first, second, last, etc.”
2. Anything written on the board is important information.
3. Outlines or lists, which may be presented in a Powerpoint or using the projector.
4. Summary statements.

How can I keep all of my notes together for a class in one place?

1. A large three-ring binder or an accordion-style document holder is best. Both allow you to add information quickly and cross-reference related ideas.
2. Some students find that a combination of a single-subject notebook and an accordion file is the best fit for them. They report keeping the most recent notes in the pocket of the notebook and older notes in the file folder. This approach allows them to save weight in their backpack.

How do I use the notes to study or review?

1. Notes should be dated. This allows you to find notes from a particular lecture quickly. In addition, your notes should have the main topic under discussion at the top of the page. *Example:* British Literature: John Donne, “Holy Sonnets”
2. Your notes should have key terms **and** definitions. If you miss a definition, Google it, or ask the professor the question in the next class session or by e-mail.
3. Use a dictionary. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED), which is available online, will help you understand the definition of the word as well as its usage history. This extra component is **critical** in some classes. In general, if you are not familiar with a word, look it up.
4. Note-taking is an active form of participation. It demands that you listen and ask questions in lecture so that you get the full picture.

5. Review of your notes should happen at the end of every day for a particular class and again at the end of the week. If there is any material present in your notes that you are not completely comfortable with, write the question down. Then ask your professor the question in class or via e-mail. Doing this will keep the information current and readily accessible. You will be able to relate it to other ideas much more quickly, especially in an essay format.
6. Reviewing for an exam is a bit different than your review during the week. You need to look at the material as a whole. Look for any missing information. What opportunities are there for essay questions? Can you string the information into a readable narrative? Can you identify themes or subjects that connect the sections of information to another? If you can answer yes to both questions, your review is finished, and you are ready for the exam. If the answer is no to either, go back and find the missing information.