

Taking Notes

Note taking is essential to both your academic life and your future career. We take notes all the time to remember something for later. This can be a note to study for an exam or it could be a task to remember.

Reasons to Take Notes (For School)

Notes trigger your memory and help you to remember the key points of a lecture or reading. They are a resource for studying or reviewing materials and will help you to remember through kinesthetic learning. This toolkit will help you evaluate your current note taking practices as well as give you some tips and tools to improve your note taking skills.

Self-Reflective Evaluation

- How do you currently take notes? (Notebook, electronic tablet, etc.?)
- How much information do you try to record? (Everything that you hear? Only what the professor writes on the board?)
- Do you have a certain format that you use? (Titles, labels, coloring system, etc.)

Tips for Note Taking

While taking notes, you are overloaded with information from all around the classroom environment. This includes both the professor's notes and the information s/he is speaking. Additionally, you are receiving information from those around you either through questions, comments, questions, etc. How do you really know what to take down? This is the essential question for improving upon your note taking skills!

When taking notes, you should:

- Focus your attention on the lecture/reading
- Take notes of what you see and hear
 - Be selective about your notes (not everything is important)
 - Translate the idea into your own words
 - Forget about spelling/grammar since your notes are only for you (unless you are taking a grammar class!)
 - Organize your notes (keeping things in order will help when you are referring back to them later)
 - Write legibly and clearly (you cannot refer to your notes later if you cannot read them)

Streamline Your Notes: Use Symbols, Numbers, and Abbreviation

There are many common **symbols** that you can use to abbreviate words and longer phrases. This can streamline your notes

/	“per”
+	“plus”
-	“minus”
x	“times” or “by” (4 x 4)
w/	“with”
w/o	“without”
w/n	“within”
=	“equals”
&	“and”
@	“at”

Be sure that you are mindful of using the same symbols in the same contexts. Confusing the symbols can cause problems when you are reviewing for a test.

Numbers can also be used to replace the words that they represent.

1	“one”
999	“nine hundred ninety nine”

It is ok to **abbreviate** words in your notes. Take long words and provide a shortened version for your notes by dropping the last few letters of the word or removing the vowels (in some cases).

Examples

Freq.	“frequently”
Lrg	“large”
Apt	“apartment”
Approx.	“approximant”

Dir. "director" or "direction"

Be sure that your abbreviations will be intelligible later. "Dir" could mean "director," "directions," "direct," etc. Can you decipher which is the intended long form for "dir" from the example below?

"He spoke to the dir. about the problem."

"The Greeks left in dir. of Troy"

Leaving out words is also another way to streamlining your notes. If you do, be sure that you are not taking out potentially vital information. Take for example the following

What you wrote: The Romans win the war

What you heard: The Romans did not win the war

This example shows that certain words are very important! Be sure to keep content words like "and," "but," "because," and common prepositions like "on," "in," "under." All of these words provide vital content to the notes that you are taking.

Organizing Your Notes

Good notes are organized enough that when you re-read them, you are able to decipher the information and recall the discussions from class. Although your goal is entirely to improve your memory on the topic, there are countless methods of organizing your notes and likely certain things will work more than others for you.

Organizing your Note Space

space is one way to keep your notes clean. The "note space," or the area where you are taking notes, should be a clean space to jot your notes. A suggested method for organizing this space is outlined below:

- Use your margins to create small notes about the main topics being discussed. This is a good idea for writing notes in your own words.
- Label your notes with the date (and potentially time if necessary).

Outlining is a good way to organize your writing in terms of providing clear sections, topics, and subtopics. The conventional method for this is to use a lettering/numbering and bulleting system. The most general information is at the top of the hierarchy. Each sub portion contains more specific information. Each section maintains a special relationship to the information under the same lettering. For example, everything that falls under topic "A" is related.

I. Main Lecture Topics

A. Topic I

i. Subtopic I

ii. Subtopic II

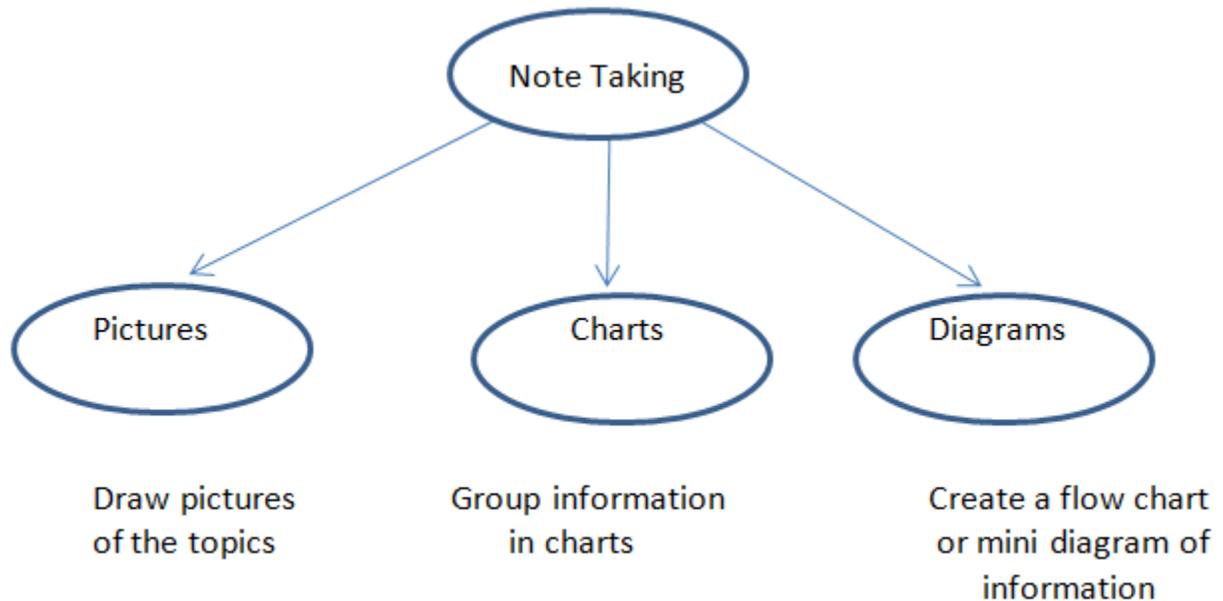
B. Topic II

i. Subtopic I

ii. Subtopic II

Outlining is a good method to keep information well-organized and sequential.

Pictures/charts work very well for visual learners. This method would include using visual diagrams rather than providing the linear categorization for outlining.



The **color-coding** method works well to create a visualization of differences in words or categories. You can, for example, use BLUE for your regular notes and RED to signify a definition of a word. This is especially helpful to point out pieces of information for quick reference. Use highlighters or different colored pens/pencils for note taking. Try to keep your color coding consistent. This will help you when studying.

Using Notes to Study

Now that you have found some ways to streamline and organize your notes, you have the tools to improve your note taking skills. Improved note taking can help improve test scores and information retention. To help you with studying, try some of these tips:

- Review your notes immediately after class to help in information recall
- Review your notes prior to exams to refresh information
- Consider re-writing your notes after class to refresh the information
- Go back after class and color code your notes by highlighting key terms or phrases to remember