

WRITE GREAT NOTES!

THE ABILITY TO TAKE GREAT NOTES is an invaluable study skill. Putting pen to paper has been proven to make information more memorable and meaningful even if you never revise or revisit your notes.

While taking notes by hand is the most effective way to retain information, notetaking doesn't look the same for everyone.

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TWO COMMON APPROACHES

There are many ways to take notes, both physically and digitally, encompassing strategies that range from shorthand to symbolic drawings. Below are two examples of common methods that require only a pen and paper.

OUTLINING!

The outlining method is a strategy that takes broad topics and breaks them into smaller pieces, moving left to right in point form as you write. This technique's strength lies in its readability and organized nature.

MAPPING!

The mapping method still uses words but in a more visual arrangement. Its strength lies in fluidness and its ability to help make connections between things. In the mapping method, a main topic might be written in the centre of the page and related matter and terms float around it. Lines and arrows with extra notes may connect terms.

KNOW WHAT TO WRITE DOWN

Good notetaking is not about transcribing every word the speaker says or frantically copying down the keynote slide before it disappears. Part of enjoying a lecture or being engaged with a speaker is about taking it all in and trying to transcribe can interfere.

Successful notetakers listen for important fragments or keywords and jot them down instead of transcription.

EXAMPLES

A new term, name or idea that is repeated more than once.

Even if it is not the topic of the lecture. Even if the definition is not provided. Unfamiliar repeated names or terms will often help you understand some of the contextual information of the topic. Ask an instructor or research the terms later to understand further.

Information that connects, or triggers that “Aha!” feeling in your brain.

It may not seem to have a clear connection, but keep track of these moments. An “aha!” moment tends to happen when a new, somewhat fuzzy idea connects with something you already know. Keeping track of these thoughts, makes it likely you will build on them and understand the subject better.

Information you already know.

When newer ideas become attached or connected to something that you already know, the old information becomes a mnemonic device allowing you to remember the new information. It may seem redundant to write down things you already know but it can produce lovely results. Plus it may surprise you how much you already know!

Questions.

Yours or the instructors, even if they are answered right away; even if they never get answered. If you write them down in some form, you then have room to expand them later.

KEEP ORGANIZED

PREPARE TO TAKE NOTES

Preparing can be as simple as having your document open or your notebook ready with a title and date before class starts. Titles could be the lecture topic, the date and class name, or a title system you invent. Keep titles consistent. This helps organize your notes in the long term. Five minutes of preparation can go a long way in making your notes easier to re-read.

TIP!

To further prep your notes, consider using some time before the class starts to jot some information you already know about the topic you are about to learn about. Were there readings? Did you discover terms you think might be discussed? Did you have questions? What did you scribble in the margins of the reading? Make a space for these thoughts in your notes and consider leaving some extra room to add related topics/thoughts as the lecture goes on. You will often be surprised at how relevant and useful they are!

BE AWARE OF WHEN AND HOW YOU TAKE NOTES

In some classes it will be appropriate to use a laptop, in others it will be more appropriate to use a notebook. While lecture and presentation formats have a clearly laid out format, class discussions might require a different, looser structure of notetaking. Ultimately use a form that works for you, but be aware of how the class is unfolding, it's key to strategy.

KEEP ALL YOUR NOTES TOGETHER

Whether they are stored in the same ‘folder’ or ‘notebook’ in digital space or in different sections in a binder or physical notebook. Grouping them by class and subject will help you study later on, give a better idea of the timeline of the class, and make it easier to pull notes or quotes for essay writing throughout the term.