

Study Skills How to Guide : Note Making

In each lesson and when you are working independently outside of class, you will need to make some notes. This could be notes from a textbook or notes of the teacher presentation or discussions you have in your groups. Researchers at the University of California (Peper & Mayer 1986) found that **students who took notes in class did 12% better** on problem solving tests on the material afterwards. **Students who took summary notes either at the end of a topic or after a lesson did between 10-15% better than those who JUST took notes in class.**

So, you should take notes in class but you should also do summary notes at the end of lessons or topics.

Before the lesson you can prepare and anticipate what you may be making notes on by

1. Looking through the notes from the last session may help you to place the next lesson in context
2. If there are presentations available in advance or you know what section will be covered then have a look at this before the session rather than going in cold.

During the lesson

1. There is no need to write down everything that is said or everything that is on the board unless you are specifically told to. The key question to ask yourself at all times is 'what is the main point?'
2. Where possible -unless there are technical terms - try to write the information in your own words. It is suggested that the use of our own words helps memory more as it secures a greater emotional connection rather than when we just copy things.
3. Consider using pens or highlighters of different colours to represent different things eg) main explanation, a key argument, strengths and weaknesses,
4. Put an asterisk or have a highlighter colour if there is something that you don't fully understand
5. Leave space around your notes so that you can add to them afterwards or during the same lesson if something that is relevant is said later on
6. Use plenty of headings and sub-headings, and numerical lists, to introduce structure into your notes
7. Use keywords in the margin, to summarise each section

What about a laptop?

Research into the difference between handwritten and electronic notes is in its early stages but the work of Mueller & Oppenheimer (2014) suggests that students who take notes on laptops tend to perform worse on subsequent assessments. It is not clear why this may be. One thought is that students who type tend to write more words and don't think as deeply about what they are writing. Another suggestion is that having other tabs open on an electronic device leads to distraction. No one is really sure but it seems that for most students, handwritten notes are better.

After the lesson you need to

1. Label and file your notes and any handouts.
2. Read through your notes filling in any details that are missing or rewriting in a more logical order
3. You could compare your notes to a friend's and check if either of you have missed anything.
4. Transforming your notes into another format eg) text to spider diagram or mindmap may help your processing of the information.

For the best results, you need to design your own method of taking more control over your note-making, informed by the ideas of others, so that it fits well with your own working style.

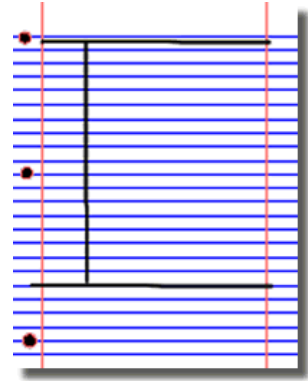
GOING FURTHER : The Cornell Method

Appendix - one way of approaching note-making is the 'Cornell note making method'

<http://coe.jmu.edu/learningtoolbox/cornellnotes.html>

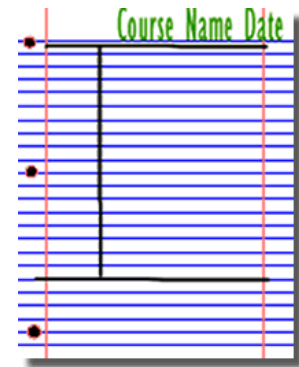
1. **DIVIDE** the paper
into three sections.

- Draw a dark horizontal line about 5 or 6 lines from the bottom.
- Draw a dark vertical line about 2 inches from the left side of the paper from the top to the horizontal line.



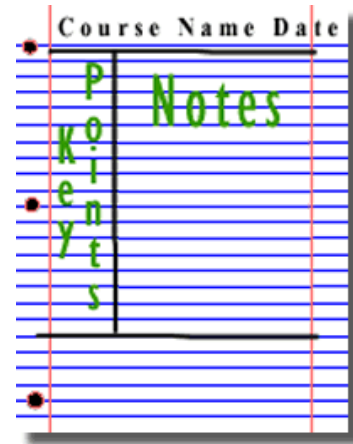
2. **DOCUMENT**

- Write course name, date, and topic at the top of each page.
- This will help you to index things later



3. WRITE notes.

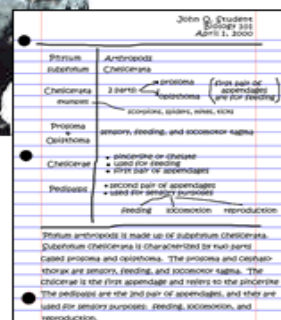
- The large box to the right is for writing notes. It is ok to skip lines and leave space - it will be easier to see things.
- It is ok to use abbreviations, Develop a shorthand of your own, such as using "&" for the word "and".
- USE the left hand column for key points and technical terms



4. REVIEW and clarify.

- Review the notes as soon as possible after class.
- Pull out main ideas, key points, dates, and people, and write these in the left column.

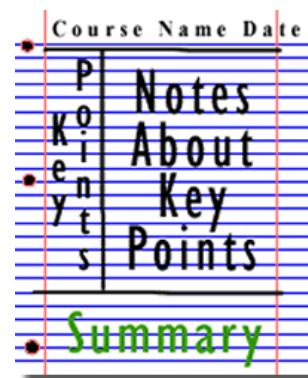
Review and Clarify



Pull out main ideas

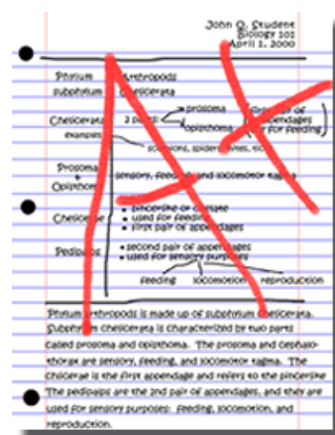
5. SUMMARISE

- Write a summary of the main ideas in the bottom section.



6. STUDY your notes.

- Re-read your notes in the right column.
- Spend most of your time studying the ideas in the left column and the summary at the bottom. These are the most important ideas and will probably include most of the information that you will be tested on.



Bibliography

Busch, B & Watson, E : The Science of Learning

Cottrell S. (2003 p. 138) The study skills handbook 2nd edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

James Madision University Website <http://coe.jmu.edu/learningtoolbox/cornellnotes.html>