

Note Taking

If you think that you will remember everything that is said in class just because you understand everything, you are **WRONG!** You'd better write it down!

Information presented in class often contains the central concepts of the course and the material most likely to be included on exams. Yet, students frequently do not realize the importance of notetaking and listening. The following handouts provide tips on how to recall more information from your lectures through active listening and purposeful notetaking. In addition, lecture notes can be a critical tool for preparing for exams. Suggestions are provided for how to use your notes regularly to review.

LEARNING BY LISTENING

You can learn a lot through listening. In college, it will be a prime source of information. Unfortunately, people do not instinctively listen well. Listening is a skill which must be developed.

If you apply the following suggestions, you will find yourself listening more effectively, both in class and out.

- 1 **Determine why what the speaker is saying is important to you.** If you don't have an immediate, vivid reason for listening to a speaker, you are an unmotivated listener.
- 2 **Take responsibility for what is being said.** The responsibility for interest and understanding lies with you, not with the speaker. Learning is up to the learner. If you simply want to sit passively and blame the speaker for your lack of success, then you're not a serious learner.
- 3 **Look for the main idea or ideas of the presentation.** Facts are important only as they support the speaker's points. Learn how to distinguish between the important and the trivial.
- 4 **Don't let your mind wander.** Your thoughts move far more rapidly than the fastest mouth, and the urge to stray is tempting. Your attention duration can be increased,

however, through deliberate effort. Continue to practice the habit of attention and don't be discouraged by early failures.

- 5 **Take notes while you listen.** Even if you recognize everything being said, jot it down, because you won't remember it later unless you do.

TAKING LECTURE NOTES

1. There are many reasons for taking lecture notes:

- a. Making yourself take notes forces you to listen carefully and test your understanding of the material.
- b. When you are reviewing, notes provide a summary of what is important in the text.
- c. Personal notes are usually easier to remember than the text.
- d. The writing down of important points helps you to remember them, even before you have studied the material formally.

2. Instructors usually give clues to what is important to take down. Some of the more common clues are:

- a. Material written on the board.
- b. Repetition
- c. Emphasis
 - Emphasis can be judged by tone of voice and gesture.
 - Emphasis can be judged by the amount of time the instructor spends on points and the number of examples he or she uses.
- d. Word signals (e.g. "There are **two points of view** on . . . " "The **third** reason is . . . " "In **conclusion** . . . ")
- e. Summaries given at the end of class.
- f. Reviews given at the beginning of class.

3. Each student should develop his or her own method of taking notes, but most students find the following suggestions helpful:

- a. Make your notes brief.
 - Never use a sentence where you can use a phrase. Never use a phrase where you can use a word.
 - Use abbreviations and symbols, but be consistent.
- b. Put most notes in your own words. However, the following should be noted exactly:
 - Definitions

- Specific facts
 - c. Use outline form and/or a numbering system. Indention helps you distinguish major from minor points.
 - d. If you miss a statement, write key words, skip a few spaces, and get the information later.
 - e. Don't try to use every space on the page. Leave room for coordinating your notes with the text after the lecture. (You may want to list key terms in the margin or make a summary of the contents of the page.)
 - f. Date your notes. Perhaps number the pages.

How?

Learning to make notes effectively will help you to improve your study and work habits and to remember important information. Often, students are deceived into thinking that because they **understand** everything that is said in class they will therefore remember it. This is quite wrong! Write it down!

As you make notes, you will develop skill in selecting important material and in discarding unimportant material. The secret to developing this skill is practice. Check your results constantly. Strive to improve. Notes enable you to retain important facts and data and to develop an accurate means of arranging necessary information.

Here are some hints on note making.

1. Don't write down everything that you read or hear. **Be alert and attentive to the main points.** Concentrate on the "meat" of the subject and forget the rest.
2. Notes should consist of **key words** or very short sentences.
3. Take **accurate** notes. You should usually use **your own words**, but try not to change the meaning. If you quote **directly** from an author, quote **correctly**.
4. **Think a minute** about your material before you start making notes. Don't take notes just to be taking notes! Take notes that will be of **real value to you** when you look over them at a later date.
5. Have a **uniform system** of punctuation and abbreviation that will make sense to you. Use a skeleton **outline** and show importance by **indenting**. Leave lots of white space for **later additions**.

6. Omit descriptions and full explanations. Keep your notes **short and to the point**. **Condense** your material so you can grasp it rapidly.
7. Don't worry about missing a point.
8. Don't keep notes on oddly shaped pieces of paper. Keep notes **in order and in one place**.
9. Shortly after making your notes, **go back and rework** (not redo) your notes by adding extra points and spelling out unclear items. Remember, we forget rapidly. **Plan time** for this vital step just as you do for the class itself.
10. **Review your notes regularly**. This is the only way to achieve lasting memory.

Examples of Note Taking Systems

The Cornell Note Taking System

The diagram shows a spiral-bound notebook with a page titled "Cornell Notes". The page is divided into three vertical sections. The leftmost section is for questions and key points, with labels: "Main Idea", "Key", and "Question (after notes are completed)". The middle section is for detailed notes, with labels: "Key words & ideas", "Important dates/people/places", "Repeated/Stressed Info", "Ideas/brainstorming written on board / overhead projector", "Info from textbook/stories", "Diagrams & Pictures", and "Formulas". The rightmost section is for personal information, with labels: "Name", "Date", "Class", and "Period". At the bottom of the page, there is a section labeled "Summary of your notes in your own words".

1. **Record.** During the lecture, record in the main column as many meaningful information and ideas as you can.
2. **Reduce.** Very soon after, summarize those information and ideas into keywords in the keyword column (the smaller one to the left).
3. **Recite.** Now hide the main area, look at each keyword and try to say as much as you can remember about it. You don't need to recall the exact words. Now, uncover your notes and verify what you have said and see how well you did. Summarize in the bottom column.
4. **Reflect.** Take some time to think about all those facts, information and ideas. Do you have opinions? Do you identify relationships? Do you spot unclear parts? ...

- 5. Review.** If you spend 10 minutes a week (or so) to review your notes, you will retain most of what you learned, and be able to use it whenever you need it.

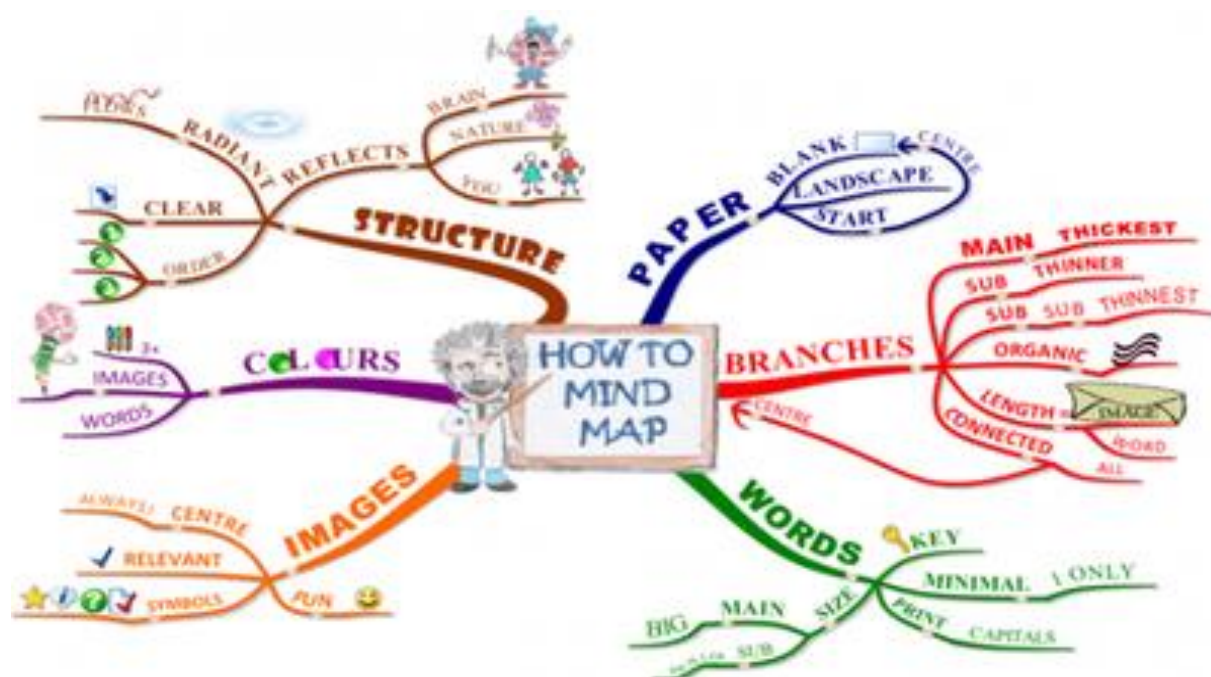
(4 cm)	(10 cm)	
Topic:	Class: Date:	
Essential Question:		
Main Ideas/Keywords	Notes	
	Summary and answers to essential question:	

The Mapping System

Mapping is about focus, comprehension and then translating the content of the lecture into a map that summarizes its ideas or facts and the relationships linking them. It is most useful with difficult, loaded or unpredictable lectures. Two kinds of maps may might fit different contexts and needs. Mind mapping and concept mapping. The present handouts choose to focus on mind mapping.

It is a highly effective way not only of recording ideas, but also of expressing them and even reflecting on them. You put the central idea in the center of the page in any form you like (title, an image, etc.) and you radiate the remaining ideas from that center using arrows, linking lines, symbols, images, colors, words, according to what organizes best the information to be mapped.

Here's an example.



Primary School Version of How to Mind Map - Source: BrainTraining4Kids.com

Homework

Use your favorite notetaking method (mindmapping or Cornell) to take notes in your other classes. Next time, bring copies of your notes for all next week's classes.

If you have another favorite notetaking system, use it, and explain it to colleagues next time.

Adapted from www.studygs.net