

General Note Taking Strategies

Before class:

1. Use ink. Pencil smears after a few weeks.
2. Label or number and date all notes.
3. Create your own shorthand or use symbols and abbreviations. Make sure you have a code system written down to help decipher later.
4. Use a Cornell format. Allow a 1.5" left margin. Use this space to list key words and make other necessary notations. You can later fold on the margin to test yourself using key words.
5. Attempt an outline format. Don't get so lost in outline detail that you lose content.

Example: I.

A.

1.

2.

6. Go to class early in order to conduct a short review of previous notes.
7. Refer to course outline or syllabus where goals and objectives are listed to indicate important concepts that require your attention and note taking abilities.
8. Use loose-leaf paper so you can integrate handouts and carry only the day's notes with you. Keep others safe in a binder. File them daily.

During class:

1. Sit front and center, if possible. Be "here and now" in class. Make direct eye contact with the instructor. Participate in class activities. Ask questions. Volunteer. Avoid doodling.
2. Use one side of paper only. Keep extra white space to "fill-in" later.
3. Mark left margin with a question mark when you wander, get lost, or can't keep up. "Fill in" later.
4. Mark left margin with items the instructor says will be on the exam with an explanation mark.

5. Use complete sentences when the material is important or difficult.
6. Take notes in your own words. Don't try to write exactly what the instructor says.
7. Write down all names, dates, places, formulas, equations, and rules.
8. Be alert to instructor's repetition. It's important material. Write it down.
9. If the instructor writes on the board, copy it in your notes.
10. Be alert to instructor's pauses, changes in speech tempo, volume, or gestures. If the instructor looks at her/his notes, write that information down.
11. Listen for introductory and concluding statements and transition words and phrases. This helps you to place information in an outline format.

After class:

1. Write the textbook page number in the left margin for related material in notes.
2. Exchange photocopies of notes with classmates. Do not solely depend on other's notes.
3. Consider typing your notes. However, the effort required to do this is usually better spent reading and thinking about them.
4. Add images and symbols in left margin. For difficult material, write a brief summary of the topics on that page in the margin.
5. Color code concepts with highlighters.
6. Review notes within 24 hours. "Fill in" and mark left margin with question mark for places you need to clarify your understanding. Ask instructor to review that concept at the next lecture.
7. Conduct short weekly reviews. Predict test questions.
8. Mark notes with paperclips on pages you need to focus on for the exam or concepts that are difficult for you and need more of your attention.
9. Consider dictating your notes to a tape recorder and listening to them.
10. Create "cram sheets" by writing key points and ideas - use diagrams, drawings, and memo aids to show the relationship of one to another. Overlearn this key material by frequent short intensive reviews of your "cram sheets."
11. If you feel you must tape a lecture, ask permission of instructor in advance.