



A Brief Guide to: NOTE-TAKING



IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER

Do not use this handout as a replacement for your assignment description. Use it as a supplement to help understand the basic expectations of your assigned genre, but *always* defer to the specific assignment description given to you by your instructor.

What is note-taking?

DEFINITION: Note-taking is the practice of writing down and recording key points of information and ideas. There are many occasions for taking notes, especially in an academic setting. In an academic setting, one can take notes during a lecture, during a seminar discussion, in response to an academic or literary reading, or at the beginning stages of writing an essay. Regardless, notes are imperative to becoming critically engaged both as reader and as writer. During most academic or professional events, it is appropriate—fundamental, even—to take effective notes.

PURPOSE: Notes serve as one’s personal record of ideas that they have learned, are learning, or are interested in exploring. Notes are the bedrock of each academic paper and help stimulate seminar discussion. By taking good notes, one is preparing for clear, concise, and agile academic engagement.

What are the necessary components of note-taking?

As stated previously, there are many occasions that are appropriate for note-taking. You can take notes using the Cornell method, mind maps, or note cards. (These are only a few methods for building a note-taking structure that works best for you.) Listed below, there are note-taking tips for three occasions in which effective note-taking is necessary for your intellectual and spiritual growth.

Taking Notes in Class:

What is important to write down?

- **Introductory remarks:** At the beginning of class, the professor usually summarizes the main points of the lecture. Listen for phrases like “A major reason” or “The main points are” or “To sum up.”
- **Repeated words and phrases** (with definitions, if possible).
- **Questions:** Write down any significant or major question that is mentioned in class.
- **Final remarks:** This is a good opportunity to ask your professor for clarification and to ask follow-up questions.
- **Be visually organized:** Underline and highlight major points and sketch subpoints underneath.
- **Be consistent** with the structure that you have established.

* Remember, do not be afraid to ask your professors and classmates to repeat themselves if you missed a crucial or stimulating point!

Taking Notes While Reading:

What is important to underline? How do I put difficult and complex ideas into succinct notes?

- **Mark and annotate** the text directly, but make sure not to over mark the text as it could distract from the main point.
- **List key words, phrases, and definitions**
- **List page numbers and the title** and author of the text.
- **Write a ONE sentence summary** after every paragraph, section, or chapter.
- After you are finished reading, **respond via a free write** to the text.

Taking Notes Before Writing or “Pre-Writing”:

How do I begin to express complex ideas? How do I formulate my own ideas?

- **Identify the topic of interest** and/ or research question
- **Write down the knowledge you already know:** This is a great time to consult your notes from class and from your reading.
- **Write down what you don’t know or what you hope to discover:** If you have lingering questions, this is an opportune time to write them down **AND** attempt to answer them.
- **Organize information and sources:** Make a list of authors that you are with whom you are engaged and pull direct quotes from their texts and explain those quotes in your own words.
- **Synthesize:** Sketch how your texts are “speaking” to one another, characterize all the ways in which they are similar and dissimilar.
- **Write the first draft of your thesis statement:** At the end of your “pre-writing” sessions, you should always aim to make meaning. Writing down your thesis statement will help you go into the next phase of the writing process with a clear directive. (Make sure that during the pre-writing session, your thesis statement does not exceed one sentence).

What are some practical tips for taking successful notes ?

- Focus on key points and main ideas. Be wary of overcompensating notes with details or exemplars from the text or lecture. You usually can reconsult those details and exemplars.
- Be precise and concise.
- Be neat and organized.
- Don’t be afraid to use visuals and color.

Where can I find more information about note-taking?

- “Taking Notes While Reading” from The Learning Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- “Effective Note-Taking in Class” from The Learning Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Compiled by Erica Hughes, Academic Coach
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