Tips for Notetaking

Am I Doing this Right?

- 78% of students surveyed use pen and paper as their primary notetaking method
- Often students mistakenly believe just because they understand everything that is said in class that they will remember it

Good Notes Will:

- Focus on the professor’s point instead of writing every word and not listening, don’t write just to take notes - should be real value for later
- Use your own words whenever possible
- Create a concise outline of: what is meaningful, concept relationships, clarification of ideas, and embellishment of material presented
- Be brief; only record key phrases or a few words to get main points

“Don't try to write everything down word for word! Inject your own personality into your notes when appropriate - if you can re-phrase what the professor is saying in your own words then you'll have an easier time recalling the information later.”

Before Class

- Do the assigned reading for class! Take notes in the margins and/or on sticky notes for points that are especially important and/or about questions to ask in class or office hours
- Some instructors provide outlines of their lectures on Power Point slides - if you find they are well integrated with the topics covered in class (sometimes these presentations are intended to be a supplement to materials presented in class), print the slides out ahead of time, and take notes on them during class (the same strategy can work for printing readings ahead of time)
- Create a loose outline for notes before class - readings, previous lecture, and syllabus give a good idea of topics the instructor will cover in class.
- If you’re taking notes on a laptop, disable wi-fi before class, so you’re not tempted to surf the web during class; this drives professors crazy!!

“Depending on the class style, I may print slides out and take notes in the margins.”

“I try to print 3-4 slides per page so that I can write directly on the slides.”

Adapted by: Katie Julian, Jodi Rosenblatt and Erika Smith, November 2014
During Class
Formatting the Actual Paper:

- Use abbreviations/symbols (underlining or asterisks) to save time, put code key in margin of paper Mark each notes set with date and title, keep each class separate
- # or indent to distinguish between major/minor/supporting ideas
- Leave blanks or make mark of missed information and ask/fill in later by talking to instructor or classmates
- Highlight unfamiliar vocabulary

“I write questions in the margins or at the top of the page, where I can clearly see them and be reminded to ask the teacher or TA.”
“Clearly label everything.”
“Using different colors or highlighting while taking notes can make it easier to study the information later.”
“I draw pictures to remember complicated patterns/interactions. Visual representation always helps and if I draw by hand it's more effective.”

Use Examples:

- Add examples your professor provides to clarify abstract ideas and to jog memory later

“I find myself writing down a lot of direct quotes from professors in my notes as that helps me understand better.”
“I focus on the professor's comments almost exclusively.”
“Write example problems as the instructor does them so you can reference them when you solve problems on your own.”
“(Professors) will often say a lot of valuable information that is not written down or included on the slides, so it is very important to be and writing down things that are not indicated anywhere else.”

Write it Down if:

- The following key moments: previews/reviews, summaries, written on board, visuals, repetition of points, change in tone/volume of voice, cause-effect relationships, pointed/gestured to, directly references text, asked if everyone understands, an example is given, pace is slowed down
- Word clues, such as: “4 causes of…” “5 aspects of…” “therefore,” “in conclusion,” “similarly,” “on the other hand,” “however”
- Write down exactly when: formula, definition, structures/diagrams, and specific fact

Include Action Steps

- If there’s anything you need to look up again, or do more research on after class, make a to-do list a section of your notes

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After Class

- More than 1:4 students surveyed *rewrite/retype notes* to organize and comprehend the material and *add information from readings* to their notes
- Try to look over your notes within a 24-48 hour period after you’ve written them, so the lecture is fresh in your mind
- Make notecards after each lecture especially if your class has a lot of terms; use them as an exam study tool
- Quiz yourself on the material you wrote down in your notes
- Fill in blanks and clarify questions you had about what you wrote in your notes

“I make sure to integrate my class and book notes to make sure I understand the concepts completely.”

In Summary

- Notetaking is a 3 part process involving habits before class, during class and after class
- Make sure that your filing/organizing systems match each other for electronic files and physical files for better integration
- It’s important to find the note taking style and organizational flow that works for you
- Don’t rely on powerpoint to do all note taking-- important information also comes from the professor’s comments and description of the material
- Write notes in your own words, not just a “carbon copy” of what your professor says, to better grasp the material
- Refer to multiple sources for taking notes--textbook/reading, professor lecture, and powerpoint slides

References

Dartmouth College, TCC, Art of Manliness, Penn State, Chapman University, CalPolyTech

This study resource was developed with input of groups of student leaders associated with Academic Services: BUGS and SSSP tutors, Disabilities notetakers, Fellowship recipients, and Roosevelt Fellows. The leaders surveyed represented all class years and academic disciplines. Many thanks to all who participated in our survey--we were glad to benefit from your expertise, and hope other students who use this resource will be as well!

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