

Notes are a brief record of important information, facts, or thoughts written to help you remember what you have read or heard. In the classroom setting, students may be asked to write notes on what they hear in a lecture or presentation, what they read in a portion of text, or what they observe in an audio-visual presentation. Note taking is an important skill that is often considered to be critical for academic success.

Although note taking is a common strategy in the classroom, it should not be assumed that students are familiar with various note-taking methods or that they are skilled in recording information. Teachers should ensure that students are exposed to note-taking strategies and should provide modelling to help students develop their own skills. Successful note taking involves attentiveness, listening skills, concentration, writing skills, and general motivation to learn. In other words, note taking may be hard work, but the efforts result in better recall and improved academic success.

There are a number of note-taking strategies that can be used, depending on the nature of the reading or presentation and on individual student preferences. Whatever method is used, a systematic and organized approach is critical. Note pages should have a title and should include a page number and date for easy reference. Notes should be kept in a notebook or a binder section designated for a specific subject. Since the purpose of note taking is to aid memory, students should prepare for class by reviewing the previous day's notes and should look over new notes immediately after class to fill in any gaps and identify any questions that may arise.

Note-Taking Methods

Outline Method

This method shows the main ideas and provides supporting evidence or examples in outline format. The main ideas are identified by capital letters or Roman numerals, and supporting information is indicated by lower case letters or numbers. Alternatively, a system of indenting may be used in which supporting information and examples are identified by dashes or bullets below the main ideas. This method is particularly useful when information is presented in a sequential or chronological manner.

Cornell Method

This method not only allows space for note taking but also for review and summary. The page is divided into two columns, with the left column approximately one-third of the page width and the right column two-thirds of the width. A horizontal section is included near the bottom of the page for summaries. Notes are taken in the right-hand column during class. The left-hand column is the recall cue column in which the notes are reduced to key terms and phrases immediately after class. Any questions that the notes answer are also listed in this column. Finally, after review of the notes, information is summarized in the summary section at the bottom of the page.

Mapping Method

Also referred to as a web or semantic map, this approach is creative in that it involves drawing and is useful in situations where information may not be presented sequentially. The topic or main idea is placed in the centre of the page in large letters and surrounded by a box or circle. Important information and examples are written around the main topic and connected to it by a line. Similarly, sub-details are connected to the information and examples. In most cases it may not matter in what order the facts are placed around the main topic or idea; however, students may wish to list notes in clockwise format beginning near the top left of the page if order is important.

Herringbone Method

This method could be considered a combination of the outline and mapping method. The main topic or idea is written in large letters in the centre of the page to represent the main bone or the "spine." The details of who, what, when, where, why, and how are added as "bones" that angle away from the spine both below and above it. Extra "bones" can be added as necessary, including for questions that may arise during the presentation or reading.

For additional information on note taking, see *Success for All Learners*:

Information-Processing Strategies: 6.49 - 6.55

Note Making: 6.82 - 6.84