

Note-Taking

Welcome to a presentation on note-taking. My name is Grover Wake, and I am a Learning Specialist with NLU's Learning Support department.

In this presentation, we will first review the importance of note-taking. Then, we will take a look at note-taking formats, followed by the different note-taking methods you can choose from. And lastly, we will look at some note-taking tips. Keep in mind that this presentation pertains mostly to note-taking during class, but the formats, methods, and tips can apply to note-taking while reading.

In college, your instructors expect you to make connections between class lectures and reading assignments. They expect you to create an opinion about the material presented. They expect you to make connections between the material in life beyond college. Your notes are your road maps for these thoughts. Note-taking is one of the most important skills to ensure your success in a class. Effective note-taking is important because it supports your listening efforts. It allows you to test your understanding of the material. It helps you remember the material better when you write key ideas down. It gives you a sense of what the instructor thinks is important, and it creates your ultimate study guide.

Let's take a look now at the different formats for note-taking. The formats are hand-written and digital. Research suggests that writing notes by hand can help us learn and remember conceptual items better than taking notes digitally. However, there are some pros to typing notes on a computer as well, including speed and storage. Consider the following differences before deciding what is best for you:

- When you write notes with paper and pen, it can be easier to create diagrams and illustrations.
- Writing notes by hand can be better for visual learners.
- Writing notes by hand provides more focus for students prone to digital distraction, and writing notes by hand can be better for comprehension and retention of conceptual information.
- The physical action of writing can help you to better process information and thereby making it easier for you to make connections among ideas.
- Writing notes with a computer or notepad can be faster than using paper and pen. This can make it easier to take a higher volume of notes.
- Writing notes digitally can be easier to edit and reorganize for later studying.

- Digital notes can be backed up, shared, and quickly searched, and taking notes digitally can be better for comprehension and retention of factual information.
- This works best when you just need to record the who, what, when, where, and why of a topic without thinking much of how the topic connects with other ideas.

Next, let's review the different methods for taking notes. There are various methods of taking notes, and which one you choose depends on both your personal style and the instructor's approach to the material. You can use each of the following methods with handwritten notes or digital notes; no specific type is good for all students in all situations, so it is best for you to develop your own style. You should also be ready to modify it to fit the needs of a specific class or instructor. To be effective, all these methods require you to listen actively and to think. Merely jotting down words the instructor is saying will be of little use to you.

The first method of note-taking we'll take a look at is a list. This method is a sequential listing of ideas as they are presented. Lists may be short phrases or complete paragraphs describing ideas in more detail. This method is what most students use as a fallback if they haven't learned other methods. This method typically requires a lot of writing, and you may find that you are not keeping up with your instructor's lectures. Also, it is not easy for students to prioritize ideas in this method.

The next note-taking method is the outline. The outline method places most important ideas along the left margin, which are numbered with roman numerals. Supporting ideas to these main concepts are indented and are noted with capital letters. Under each of these ideas, further detail can be added, designated with an arabic number, a lower case letter, and so forth. The outline is a good method to use when material presented by the instructor is well organized. Also, an outline is easy to use when taking notes on your computer.

A third method of note-taking is the concept map. When designing a concept map, place a central idea in the center of the page, and then, add lines and new circles in the page for new ideas, use arrows and lines to connect the various ideas. The concept map is a great method to show relationships among ideas. It is also effective if the instructor tends to hop from one idea to another and back.

The last note-taking method we will look at is called the Cornell method. The Cornell method uses a two-column approach: the right column about two-thirds of the page is used for taking notes using any of the previous note-taking methods or a combination of them. The left column takes up no more than a third of the page and is often referred to as the queue or recall column. After class or completing a reading, review your notes

and write the key ideas, concepts, or questions in the left column. You may also include a summary box at the bottom of the page in which to write a summary of the class or reading in your own words. The Cornell method provides a useful format for calling out key concepts, prioritizing ideas, and organizing review work. Most colleges recommend using some form of the Cornell method.

Now, let's take a look at some important tips for note-taking:

The first tip is to be prepared. Make sure you have the tools you need to do the job. If you are using a notebook, be sure you have it with you and that you have enough paper. Also, be sure to have your pen as well as a spare and perhaps a pen with different colored ink to use for emphasis. If you are taking notes on your laptop, make sure the battery is charged.

Select the application that lends itself best to your style of note-taking. Microsoft Word works very well for outline notes, but you might find taking notes in Excel to work best if you are working within the Cornell method. It's easier to align your thoughts in the queue or recall column to your notes in the right column; just be sure you keep one idea per row.

Write on only one side of the paper. This will allow you to integrate your reading notes with your class notes. Label, number, and date all notes at the top of each page. This will help you keep organized.

When using a laptop, position it such that you can see the instructor and whiteboard right over your screen. This will keep the instructor in your field of vision. Even if you have to glance at your screen or keyboard from time to time, make sure your focus remains with the instructor and not on your laptop.

A word of caution about laptops for note-taking: use them if you are very adept at keyboarding, but remember that not all note-taking methods work well in laptops because they do not really allow you to draw diagrams and use special notations such as scientific and math formulas, for example.

Don't try to capture everything that is said. Listen for the big ideas and write them down. Make sure you can recognize the instructor's emphasis cues and write down all ideas and keywords the instructor emphasizes. Listen for clues like "the four causes were" or "to sum up."

Copy anything the instructor writes on the board; it's likely to be important.

Leave space between ideas. This allows you to add additional notes later; for example, notes on the answer to a question you or one of your classmates asked.

Use signals and abbreviations. Which ones you use is up to you, but be consistent so you will know exactly what your signals and abbreviations mean when you review your notes. You may find it useful to keep a key to your abbreviations in all of your notes.

Use some method for identifying your own thoughts and questions to keep them separate from what the instructor or textbook author is saying. Some students use different color ink. Others box or underline their own thoughts. Do whatever works best for you.

Create a symbol to use when you fall behind or get lost in your note-taking. Jot down the symbol, leave some space, and focus on what the instructor is covering now. Later, you can ask a classmate or the professor to help you fill in what you missed, or you can find it in your textbook.

Review your notes as soon as possible after class. The same day is best. This is the secret to making your notes work.

Use the recall column to call out the key ideas and organize facts. Fill in any gaps in your notes and clean up or redraw hastily drawn diagrams.

And lastly, write a summary of the main ideas of the class in your own words. This is a process that greatly aids to recall. Be sure to include any conclusions from the lecture or the discussion.

If you would like to work one-on-one with a Learning Specialist to discuss note-taking, please contact Learning Support at learn@nl.edu.