11 Note-Taking Strategies

Notes can be organized in different ways depending on your personal preference, the subject matter, and how information is presented in class.

1. Cornell method
Divide a page into two parts. In one column, record key words and concepts that can help you with the recall of the main information. Record notes in another column. Write the summary at the bottom of the page. (See example below).

Advantages
- Presents a visual organization of notes that are easy to follow
- Identification of key words and concepts
- Notes can be used for reviews before exams.
- You can scan the notes and save them.

[page number & topic covered]	
Key Words	Record your notes here during the lecture.
Key Concepts	
Questions	
Summarize your notes here in your own words.	

Steps
- *Format.* Divide a piece of notebook paper by drawing a line from top to bottom. Make the line 2 inches from the left side of the page.
- *Title.* On the top of each page, write a page number and the topic covered.
- *Taking notes.*
    o On the right side of the paper, record the notes during the lecture.
    o Skip lines between main ideas and several lines between topics.
    o Use symbols, abbreviations and short phrases instead of complete sentences.
- *Reviewing and clarifying*
    o As soon as possible, review your notes in the right column and clarify information that were ambiguous.
    o Compare your notes with textbook's or other students' notes.
    o Then pull the main ideas, key words and concepts, and write them in the left column.

- *Summarizing*
    o Summarize the main topics of this page of notes at the bottom of the page.
    o Use your own words in order to practice explaining the topic.

2. Two-column method
This method is less structured than the Cornell method. Use this method to keep track of key terms and definitions, or processes.

<u>Steps</u>
- Divide the paper vertically in two columns by drawing a line from top to bottom.
- On the top of the page, write a page number and the topic that will be covered.
- In the left hand column, record very brief information, key words, ideas, and concepts.
- In the right hand column, write an explanation for each key word and concept.
- After class, review your notes in the right column and clarify any ambiguous information.
- Compare your notes with the textbook or other students' notes.
- When you study, you can add extra columns if you want to add any other relevant information.

3. Outlining
This method uses a pattern of indented spaces to organize information.

<u>Steps</u>
- Place major points farthest to the left.
  - Indent each specific point to the right.
    - Level of relationship will be identified by the distance away from the major point.

4. Mapping Method
This method is a graphical presentation of information. It can be used after lectures in the form of concept mapping or "mind mapping". Check out the step-by-step guide titled [How to Construct a Concept Map](#).

<u>Advantages</u>
This method visually helps with an understanding a big picture and relationships between concepts.

<u>Disadvantages</u>
It is difficult to create a concept map during a lecture.

5. Shrinking notes (also called "chunking")
This method is helpful for making detailed notes more manageable and easier to review.

<u>Steps</u>
- For each paragraph of your notes, summarize notes in one or two words, or a short phrase.
- Then, think how you can organize your notes in chunks around major thoughts or concepts.
- Write these major topics in the left column (similar to the Cornell method)

6. Charting Method

Used to categorize information. Can be helpful for pharmacology, comparing symptoms of diseases, etc. (see examples below).

Advantages
Organizing the material in categories after class will help you to see the relationships between information. It will be easier to compare and contrast, see differences and similarities.

Disadvantages
Difficult to use during the class because you need time to create the chart

Examples
Pharmacology:

Drug Name	Trade Names	Indications & Usage	Contraindications	Mechanism of Action	Side Effects
Naproxen Sodium	Aleve Naprosyn	…	…	…	…

Pathology/Epidemiology:

Disease Name	Alternate Name	System	Symptoms	Test Results	Treatment
Chronic Thyroiditis	Hashimoto's disease	Endocrine	…	…	…

7. Sentence Method

Write every new topic, fact or idea on a separate line and number them.

Advantages
The notes are slightly more organized than a paragraph in the text.

Disadvantages
You cannot easily identify the main points, key words and concepts and relationships. You will still need to organize these notes. (Consider color coding and highlighting, described below.)

8. Color coding

To help you with triggering your memory when reviewing your notes, you can use different colors for the relative importance of information and comparison.

Steps
Use a different color of highlighter to distinguish different types of information and organize them by topic or by relationship to each other. Develop your own color coding depending on the type of material and organization of the notes.

9. Abbreviations

Using abbreviations can increase speed of note-taking during lectures. Use common abbreviations and/or create abbreviations that remind you of the full word.

Examples
B4 = before   ≥ = greater than or equal to   ml = milliliter
w/ = with   Δ = change   → = leads to/causes

10. Symbols/Underlining

Use symbols and/or underlining to emphasize areas that you want to revisit or that the instructor emphasizes.

Advantages
Easy to use during the lecture.

Disadvantages
Only helpful if you remember what the symbol/underline means.

Steps
- Write your notes as you normally would.
- When the instructor emphasizes a topic (repeats it several times in the lecture or says "this will be important later", etc.), underline it or put a symbol next to it
- Use a symbol or underline the same way each time, so that you will know what it means.

11. Technology-Based Tools

Many phones and tablets include note-taking options to combine traditional note-taking and technology. Read more about technology based tools under Note-taking on the On Demand Learning Support page on the SSC website.

Advantages
Useful if you have a mobile device with you often. Some applications are free.

Disadvantages
Some of these applications only work with a mobile device, and some have a cost associated with them.

Examples
- Coggle
- Evernote
- Google Drive
- Liquid Text
- MindMeister
- Padlet
- Text2MindMap

Information adapted from the Penn State University Center for Academic Achievement "Note Taking Strategies" study guide.