

Note-Taking

General Strategies

Although students are expected to take notes, they are rarely taught how. This is unfortunate, as note-taking is a powerful tool through which to understand the material and achieve success—and a good note-taking technique is *not* acquired automatically. No single technique works for all students, but there are some general rules.

1. *Filter the information.*

Do not copy every word; filter the lecture, noting only the expressions you will need to prompt your memory. Do not try to preserve whole sentences; concentrate on key ideas. You may even use a personal shorthand. Just be sure your system can record the essentials of a lecture—and be sure you can understand it later.

2. *Classify the information.*

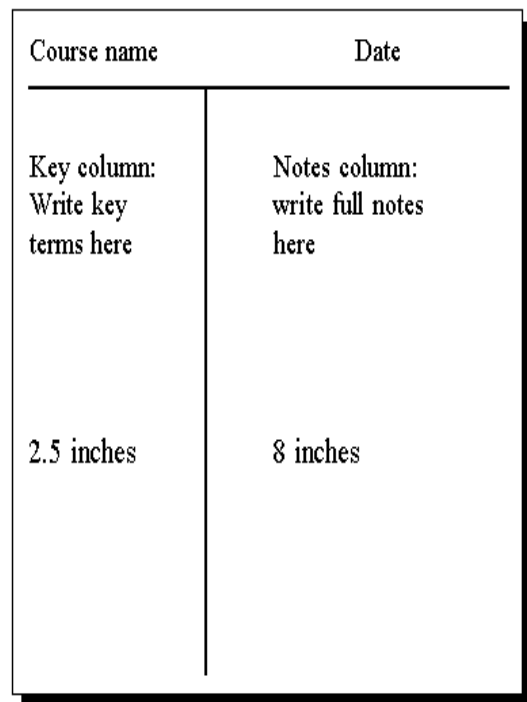
You will probably be working with at least three types of information: main ideas, which define the lecture; references to outside works, which you may wish to consult; and examples, which help to illustrate the point. You will record each differently: the key to grasping the main ideas of a lecture lies in *listening*, while references must be recorded briefly but precisely, and examples may be quickly sketched in.

3. *Organize the information.*

Finally, you should consider adopting a formal plan for your notes. Even if your own note-taking system is adequate, you may be able to improve the clarity or consistency of your notes—or even save some time.

The Cornell System

There are specific formal systems designed to make notes clearer and more useful; one popular approach is the Cornell system, which divides your page into areas for notes and for cues, and which specifies activities to be undertaken *before* and *after* as well as *during* lectures.



Before Lecture

- Write course name, date and topic at the top of the page
- Divide the paper into two sections by drawing a vertical line about 2 inches from the left side of the paper from top to bottom

During Lecture

- Record your notes in the large box to the right
- Try to capture the main ideas
- Skip a line between ideas and topics, and leave sufficient space to add or reorganize without re-writing
- Don't use complete sentences; use abbreviations, whenever possible
- Use bullets and dashes to indicate topics and subtopics; don't worry about developing an elaborate outline
- Develop a shorthand of your own (& = and; b/f = before; w/ = with, etc.)

After Lecture

- Review your notes as soon as possible after class
- Pull out main ideas, key points, words, and phrases, and write them in the left column; these are your “cues”
- To study, cover the right side of your notes and try to restate the lecture using only the “cues” on the left