

Taking Notes in Class

I. Page Setup: Cornell System

	Date	Topic
Leave blank – 2”	Notes	
	2-3 lines – leave blank	

II. Background Information.

- A. Today we will be discussing an organized way of study that starts with taking notes in class and ends with preparing for and taking tests. Some ancient Greeks living before the Christian era began felt that writing was a bad invention. They were afraid people would rely on writing and not their memories
- B. Why take notes in class? Let's look at some advantages.
1. 20 minutes after this class, the normal student will forget 50% of what was said if that student just listened and did nothing else. 70% of what is said will be gone by this time tomorrow.
 2. Helps keep you alert; helps concentration.
 3. Sets up system for review.
 4. The act of writing/summarizing/seeking main ideas helps with learning.
- C. Why not just tape record?
1. Tape can be more boring than the teacher. If you feel the teacher is boring, you'll have to relisten to the same boring lecture.
 2. Must find time to listen.
 3. Lose the tactile (writing) part of learning.
 4. Notetaking & listening improve with practice.
- D. How can you best use a tape recorder? Or when should you use one?
1. You tend to space out a lot in class or are extra tired.
 2. It's a particularly difficult or technical course/session.
 3. Your instructor talks very fast, has a strong accent you have difficulty understanding, or uses large or technical vocabulary.
 4. You rely heavily on auditory learning or something prevents you from taking notes.
- E. If I were to say one word to help your studying and learning it would be:

THINK

As you're listening to the lecture, think about what you just heard and ask yourself- does it make sense? How does it fit with what else I know?

Information being read or presented by the instructor may not always make sense – for some of you the pattern on the screen didn't sense. So you used what else I said to help – I told you there was a word & it had to with learning. You kept trying to make sense of it and not just forgot to try. When you couldn't make sense you asked others, your facial expressions & body language told me you didn't understand. The same things that helped you make sense of the “think” transparency can help with difficult lectures. Now we'll go through the Cornell system, an organized lecture note system that begins with taking notes & ends with preparing for tests.

III. Cornell

- A. Setting up – Give illustration. Why are date & topic important – sometimes teachers refer back to a date, others a topic when stating what's on a test. The topic is a guide for you & the instructor if you have questions about a lecture.
- B. Take notes – Be sure to have notebook open & ready to take notes when teacher walks into class. Don't take down every word, but do try to get concepts down. Some of you may want to use keywords for further study from the textbook. Others may want detailed notes. This part is somewhat individual in nature.

Challenge – At home cover up the blue written lecture notes. Then read the lectures & practice making your own notes. Then compare yours to the book's.

Since I noted these pages as important you should have noted this in your notes.

- C. Revise – This step requires you to take some time as soon after the lecture as possible but during the same day of the lecture to fix your notes. Do not recopy notes. Simply recopying notes is a time waster. For permanent learning of information, the brain needs to be tested and reciting is practice. Do you learn to ride a bike by just reading? I'll discuss more about the questions shortly. If you do not have revisions, make a checkmark on the left page directly across from the notes that are ok. If you do make revisions, mark through the notes that you no longer need. Correct misspellings & insert things you missed. Sometimes you'll find that you wrote down a story, etc, that you won't have to study – crossing out now, saves time later.
- D. Questions – In this method you only use 1 page for both questions & answers although you find that it is easier to put questions on the back of the preceding page. Why is it important to put questions & answers in 2 places? So when you ask yourself the question, you know the information is in your brain & not that your eye saw the answer as you read the question. The book mentions recall info in margins. This is ok but questions are far better – force you to test yourself.

You formulate possible test questions from the content of your notes. Use the 5 W's – who, what when, where, why or how, describe explain. The questions go in the left-hand margin of each page. It's good to put numbers in the questions – what are 5 ways, what are 4 reasons, etc. Do not put yes/no or true/false – use questions that force recall and applications. If you have vocabulary words, put them on 3x5 cards. You may also want to highlight answers.

Why write questions? They help to clarify meanings, reveal relationships, establish continuity & strengthen memory.

For practice, making questions at home, see page 80 in textbook. Cover up the blue wording of the author & try making questions & then compare yours to the book.

- E. Review – Before you leave these notes review what you know and relearn what you have forgotten. This requires you to cover up notes & ask yourself the questions you have formulated. If you know the answers, then you have reviewed what you know. If you do not know the answer then you should study your notes and revisions to relearn what you have forgotten. Remember this will not work unless you review on a regular basis. It is important that you actually ask yourself the questions, and make yourself answer those questions. It's like trying to outguess the teacher – What questions would she/he ask in a test from this material? Study – Review – can be done in odd minutes between classes, waiting for class to start, putting your dead time to use. You already have questions so test yourself and mark the ones you didn't know the answers to and return to these. You should be spending some time each week doing early test study for each course. Yes, this takes some time, at first, but it saves time in the end as you won't have to cram the night before a test.
- F. I often hear students say – but I have my own way of taking notes – I'm not asking you to change your notetaking – except how it is on the page – what I am suggesting is to change your studying habits for a test. In this system you start studying immediately after class as you revise your notes & write the questions – it saves the last minute cramming and helps the information stay longer with you. What some students mean by changing how they take notes, is that they don't want to take any notes.

Last, Reflect/Think on info & connect it to yourself if possible. What's the importance of these things? How can I apply them to what I already know? This also helps put it into long-term memory.

IV. Now let's look at some problems that arise in using Cornell, or any notetaking system, and how to solve them.

A. First consider – How important is this lecture to you?

1. Does it influence your major, career or life?
2. How important is it to the lecturer?
3. Does the lecturer duplicate the text & handouts or go beyond it?
4. If a lecture is very technical, beyond the book, & weighs heavily in text questions – getting lecture down may be more important than if it is all covered in the text or is a lecture not for a grade.

B. For math & science – all drawings or examples on board or overhead – write down to use as pattern or help in doing homework or for tests. For hard words like Pythagorean – have book open to copy from, or start word & leave a blank.

C. When instructors talk fast. Read these to students & have them put into own words & keep up, using as few words as possible. Then show transparency of some shorter versions.

1. **Leave large empty spaces in your notes.** Leave plenty of room for filling in information you missed. Use a signal or symbol that means you missed something so you'll remember to come back to it. Make the space obvious.
2. **Be willing to make choices.** When an instructor talks fast, focus your attention on key points. Don't try to write everything down. Choose what you think is important and don't panic. Sometimes students paralyze themselves with fear that they are missing something important. Occasionally you will make a wrong choice and neglect an important point. Worse things could happen. Stay with the lecture, write down key words, and revise your notes immediately after class. See pages 80-81 for practice taking notes.
3. **Use abbreviations.** I deliberately went fast.
4. **Exchange photocopies of notes with classmates.** Your fellow students might write down something you missed, and your notes might help them. Compare notes, and if this is the case, make agreement to exchange notes regularly.

5. **Take more time to prepare for class.** Familiarity with a subject increases your ability to pick out key points. If an instructor lectures quickly or is difficult to understand, make a point of conducting a thorough preview of material to be covered. Set the stage for the lecture.
6. **See the instructor after class.** Take your class notes with you and show the instructor what you missed. Most instructors appreciate visits from students. You can also ask questions you didn't get to ask in class.
7. **Ask questions.** Ask questions in class to clarify information.
8. **Facial expressions.** Use facial expressions to send messages to teachers when you don't understand.
9. **Be ready.** Be ready to take notes when teacher begins & listen & take notes to end of lecture.
10. **Handouts.** Refer to handouts to see if details are already written down.
11. **Ask the instructor to slow down.** We saved the obvious for last. You can simply ask her/him to slow down or, if that seems inappropriate, ask her/him to repeat what you missed.

Now use transparency & explain how to cut down words. Show transparency of abbreviations. When teacher mentions pages in book, put that in your notes.

- V. Listening requires ACTIVE participation...posture and body language is one way to help the speaker;
- a. Hands on hip & scowl = larger body image or anger, intimidation
 - b. Eyes moving away = Not interested
 - c. Body turned away from speaker, but head towards = Power
 - d. Leaning over desk=aggression
 - e. Caps with visors low, slouching=not interested.
 - f. Sunglasses="leave me alone" Drugs?
 - g. Can you think of any?

Thinking Questions

Application – How can I use this information?

Analysis – How do these notes fit with other lectures & textbook assignments?

Synthesis – What does this all mean? How can I summarize it?

Evaluation – How useful is this info? Is it clear? What don't I understand? What added info do I need?