Taking Great Notes

TiLT Learning Programs Presents
An Academic Skills Workshop
Reasons I Don’t Take Notes in Class...

A. I never use my class notes again, so why cramp my hand?

B. My instructor posts his/her Powerpoints on RamCT, so I don’t need to take them myself.

C. Everything the professor says is in the book.

D. I don’t get what’s going on in class anyway, so what’s the point??!

E. My professor talks too fast, so I miss half of what I should be writing down, anyway.

Sound familiar??
Getting good grades is easier if you take good notes

There are FOUR steps to notetaking...
Step 1: Listening

• Sounds obvious, right? But listening means attending to what your instructor is saying
  • Attending is an active process where:
    • you make an intentional choice to take in what is being said,
    • relate it to your own experiences and what you already know,
    • and actively think of questions as you are processing the new information

• Ask yourself: *Have I mastered the art of “pseudo-listening”*
  • Hints that you are a “pseudo-listener” =
    • You have trouble remembering things people tell you in your personal life
    • When you go back over your class notes, you don’t remember actually learning any of the information
Listening Tip

• Try to find something interesting, or some kind of useful application for what your professor is going over. This will lead you to the next step in the note-taking process...
Step 2: Cognitive Processing

- Note-taking is active—Your mind should be processing while you’re writing
- It is possible to hear what your instructor says, and even be able to repeat back certain points from the lecture, without true comprehension of the material
Cognitive Processing Tip

- Make sure that you understand each lecture point or idea in your own words, and connect that point to what you already know, even if it’s something you know from personal experience or from another class.
Step 3: Recording

- Requires *decoding*: putting content (what the professor says) writing – into words
- Difficult because we can’t write as fast as someone speaks
- It’s easy to miss major points in the lecture if you’re busy scribbling every detail
- Taking shortcuts is important – *more on this later*
Recording Notes Tip

- Work on achieving a balance between listening for and recording **main ideas** with getting down **specific examples and details**.
Step 4: Reviewing

- Go back over your class notes as soon as possible after class
- FACT: Notetakers who review their notes regularly perform better on quizzes and tests than notetakers who do not
- Reviewing doesn’t mean just “looking over”: use your review time to fill in gaps, add main idea captions, and write in your own examples
- If you have holes in your notes, make note of it now. Ask your professor about it at the next class, go to office hours, or ask a classmate to get the missing info
Reviewing Tip

- Review your notes within 24 hours of taking them, while the lecture is still somewhat fresh in your mind.
- Even better: take 15 minutes after every class to go over your notes – it will pay off dividends when you know the material and therefore don’t have to put in as much study time just before exams!
• Steps 1 – 3 occur in class, all while you are rushing to write down everything you think your professor wants you to know. It’s where most students STOP with their notes, up until test time

• Step 4, on the other hand, occurs after class, and involves you putting in some extra time between class to review, fill in gaps, and make extra notes
Five Steps to Fantastic Notes

1. Take Charge!

- Every time you enter a class where you know the majority of the period will be spent listening, prepare yourself to be active and engaged in the material.
- The responsibility for learning in class is YOURS, not your professor’s.
- A lecture day doesn’t mean a “sit back and relax” day.
2. Listen for the Overview

- Your professor will likely state the purpose of the lecture, or provide some sort of outline of what the day’s lecture will be focusing on and going over.
- Listening at the beginning of the lecture for this overview will give you the framework you need to understand the lecture and how it fits in overall with the other things you are learning.
3. Don’t just write everything down.

- You end up scrambling to take everything down, word-for-word
- Gives us a sense of control – that no information in the class will escape us!
- BUT—it’s more effective to listen for the organizational structure of the lecture, so that you get down the really important stuff
  - Major points and sub-points
4. Learn the common clues that an idea or concept is important

- Professor writes it on the whiteboard
- Repetition of an idea or phrase
- Emphasis through non-verbals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocal emphasis</th>
<th>Pauses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Gestures</td>
<td>• Amount of time spent on a particular idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Number of examples she/he gives to illustrate the point</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Numbers
  • Example: “Today we will be discussing the four major ways that foreign policy outlines how governments will interact with other countries and non-state actors”
  • If you were sitting in the above lecture, what would be important to get in your notes?

• Signposts
  • Words that indicate a new topic is being introduced, a shift in ideas, or that a point is particularly important
    • Examples: “Next…”
    • “Then”
    • “On the one hand”
    • “Similarly,”
    • “Most importantly,”
5. Review

Just as you listened for the overview of the lecture at the beginning of class, listen for the professor to review the major points (or at least a statement of what the overall main idea/purpose of the lecture was)

At the end of class, or before you review your notes after class, try to come up with a short summary in your own words of what you think the main point of the lecture was
Notetaking Methods
Cornell Notes

- Idea: You’ll be able to take notes as you can in class, while leaving room to fill in what you miss after class. Allows you to easily group notes into main categories.

- Best used for: Lecture-based classes where you aren’t always able to follow the key points of the lecturer.
Outlining

- Idea: You’ll have naturally organized notes from which to study
- Best used for: Lecture where the information is presented in a fairly organized, logical manner
- Not so good for: Math & Science
Concept Mapping

- Idea: Cuts down on notetaking time and gives a nice overview of “big picture” ideas and how they relate to one another

- Best used for: Students who are visual learners, and when you need to see the organization of ideas laid out in a flowchart or visual representation

- Makes it easy to see relationships between ideas and concepts

- Not so good for: Students who are not visual learners (don’t like reading graphs, maps, and charts) or classes where it’s hard to glean the major points from lecture in class and how the points relate to one another
Sentence Outline

• Idea: Notes are most helpful if they are complete, including specific details.

• Best for: students who are quick writers/typers and are able to abbreviate while maintaining clarity of ideas

• When the material isn’t organized clearly, you’ll still “get down” all of the important material

• BUT—you will have to go back through the info later to understand how it should be organized

• Not so good for: Distinguishing between main points and subpoints, and understanding relationships between concepts
Note Card Method

- **Idea:** You’ll capture course information in small “bits” – so each notecard should represent one major idea.
- **If you keep your cards in order (by numbering them) you’ll learn relationships between course content.**

- **Best for:** Courses for which you have to memorize concepts, processes, formulas, theories, or dates.
  - **Bonus:** You’ll be taking notes that are portable, so that you can “study on the go.”
- **Not so good for:** Courses with dense, detailed info that doesn’t fit neatly on one card.
General Tips: Taking Good Notes
1. Have either a spiral notebook or a three-ring binder devoted to each class separately
   - Use different colors for each class to keep them organized & separate

A three-ring binder with loose-leaf paper works well so that you can add in handouts and other materials

2. Each day when you sit down in class, write the date and either the Chapter, Unit, or Topic that will be discussed that day at the top of the page
• 3. Write or type quickly (if you use a laptop in class). Remember, you don’t have to write full sentences. Abbreviate and use shortcuts so that you get the important info you need.

• 4. Take notes in your own words – you don’t need to have what the prof says down, word-for-word.
  • This will also aid in your actual comprehension of the lecture because it involves an extra step in the processing of information.
  • Things that DO need to be copied exactly include:
    • Definition of words
    • Facts: Dates, info about people, etc.
    • Mathematical formulas
5. Use different colors or highlighters to make important ideas stand out—this will also make studying easier.

6. If you miss something you think is important, write down a key word or two, leave some space, and ask your prof or classmates if they got the point you missed after class.
7. REVIEW your notes as soon as possible after class!
Questions??

Thanks for coming! For more info about TiLT Learning Programs, visit us at:

http://tilt.colostate.edu/learning/

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