





WRITING TOOLS: Note Taking Strategies

Knowing how to take effective notes is crucial for success in University. The key to good note taking is to keep your notes simple, easy to read and organized so that you can easily retrieve the information when you need it. Only take notes on information that really matters. Pay attention to keywords that will help refresh your memory later. Below are some general guidelines for effective note-taking as well as descriptions of 4 common methods for taking notes. Each has advantages and disadvantages, so it is a good idea to try different methods in order to find one that works for you.

For more help, contact an academic writing instructor at the Writing & Learning Centre: <https://alexander.mywconline.com>

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE NOTE-TAKING

-  Notes should be brief, complete, and easy to read
 - Only take notes of information you need, don't write unnecessary words/ details
-  Devise a method to distinguish important concepts or terms from minor points
 - Highlight points, number examples, or indent points
 - Be consistent in your technique for indentifying points
 - E.g.: use different colours for main ideas, supporting ideas, and sub-points)
-  If information can be categorized, it might be a good idea to use a grid or table
-  Use abbreviations and symbols for words
 - Make sure you understand what each symbol or abbreviation means

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID:

As mentioned above, knowing how to take good notes is a key to academic success. Here's a short list of common mistakes students make. These are ineffective note-taking strategies and you should avoid them:

1. **Taking a photograph of the board** – this might seem like a good idea, but unless you transform the information into your own words, you haven't really interacted with the material. *Unless you interact with the material that's being taught, you don't actually learn anything.*
2. **Taking notes in other languages** – it's hard to get away from our preferred 'mother tongues', but if you write your notes in any other language that is not English you won't learn the English terminology for your classes and you won't develop your English skills. Isn't learning English one of the reasons you chose to study in Canada?
3. **Relying on the Instructor's Power Point slides** – it's great that many instructors make these slides available, but they should be a framework for your own notes. *Unless you interact with the material that's being taught, you don't actually learn anything.* Add in things you discussed in class, such as definitions for words you didn't understand or questions asked during the lecture; sketch any illustrations your instructor drew on the board.

1. THE CHARTING METHOD

When a lecture contains information with distinctive characteristics it makes sense to arrange information into a grid or chart. This method works well when information can be easily arranged into categories. Information in chart-form is easy to review making this a good system for memorizing facts, making comparisons & for establishing relationships between concepts. This also cuts down on the amount of writing.

How to use the Charting Method:

Divide your page in the appropriate number of columns for your subject.

- Example:
 - For a history class, appropriate column headings would be “Period”, “Event”, “Context”, “People”, and “Significance”.
 - For a biology class, appropriate column might be “Cell Type”, “Function”, “Organisms”, “Importance”.
 - For an English class, appropriate column headings might be “Event”, “Characters”, “Significance”.

PERIOD	EVENT	CONTEXT	PEOPLE	SIGNIFICANCE
1881–1885	Pacific Railway Construction	Confederation of Canada	Sir John A. Macdonald	Impact on economy
		Made confederation possible		Facilitated trade between provinces
				Joined eastern and western provinces
				Helped west feel less isolated

2. THE CORNELL METHOD

This method focuses on identifying main ideas and supporting statements. It is an efficient system for recording and reviewing notes. When preparing for a test, you can cover key ideas or concepts with a paper, and then try to guess their meaning

How to use the Cornell Method for taking notes:

Divide the paper into three sections.

- Draw across the full width of the page about 5 or 6 lines from the bottom.
- Along the left side of the page, draw a vertical line about 2 inches from the left edge of the paper from the top of the page to meet the horizontal line you have already drawn at the bottom.

Document

- Write course name, date, and topic at the top of each page.

Write notes.

- The large box to the right is for writing notes.
- Skip a line between ideas and topics.
- Don't use complete sentences.
- Use abbreviations, whenever possible.

Review and clarify.

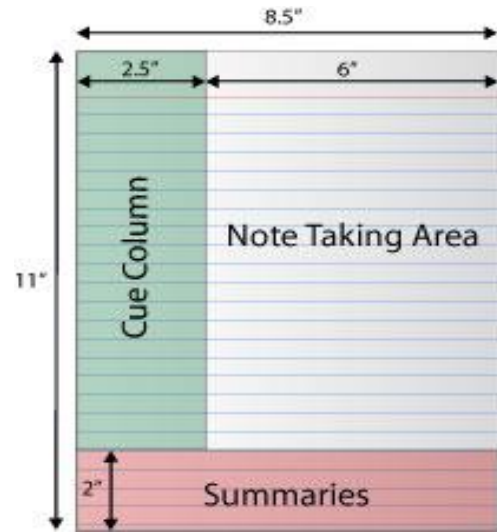
- Review the notes as soon as possible after class.
 - This is essential!
 - Remember what we said about how *learning involves interacting with the material.*
- Pull out main ideas, key points, dates, and people, and write these in the left column.

Summarize

- Write a summary of the main ideas in the bottom section.

Study your notes.

- Re-read your notes in the right column.
- Focus on the ideas in the left column and your summary
- These are the most important ideas
- They are also most likely to be the things you are tested on



Source: googleimages.ca

3. OUTLINE METHOD

This method follows a hierarchical or outline form of organization. It uses a dash or indentation system to emphasize relationships between points and separate main points from supporting points. You can categorise your notes with as many sub-headings and sub-points as you require. When your points are well organised it makes your notes easy to follow and revise.

How to use the Outline Method:

- No pre-planning or set-up is required for this method; as the lecture moves to a new topic, create new topics in your outline.
 - Use letters of the Roman Numbers to identify major topics in your notes
 - Capital alphabet letters identify key points or sub-headings
 - Related points or ideas are numbered
 - Sub-points are alphabetical

Basic Outline looks like this:

I. First Major Topic

A. Sub Heading

- a. supporting/related idea
- b. supporting/related idea
- c. supporting/related idea
 - i. detail
 - ii. detail
 - iii. detail
 - iv. detail

Example: Notes from a Philosophy Lecture

I. Rule Utilitarianism

A. Right actions determined by whether or not they conform to optimal rule

a. Optimal rule is rule that usually generates greatest good when everyone complies

B. Challenge:

a. Determining optimal rule

b. What about cases that are exceptions?

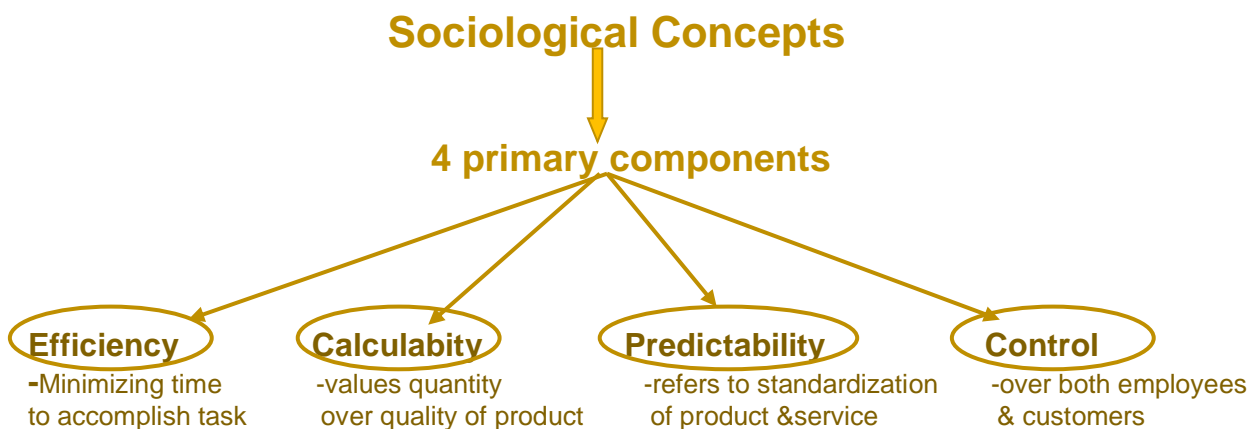
i. Sometimes following the rules can generate more harm

4. THE MAPPING METHOD

In this method, your content is visually presented in a map-type organization, allowing you to visually track the lecture and easily identify the relationships between ideas and concepts. This is a good format to use when the lecture content is intense and well organized or when you have no idea what method the lecture will follow.

How to use the Mapping Method:

- Identify your major topic for the lecture
 - Below it, list a key theme or idea
- Related concepts or ideas are connected to each other through arrows.
- As new topics are introduced, create new concept maps
 - You may end up with more than one or a concept map that has several layers depending on the content and length of your lecture.



Sources: www.redlands.edu/.../1Five_Methods_of_Notetaking.docx