Note Taking

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Before Class Preparation

- **How:** Do the reading on the topic of the lecture before class.
  **Why:** You can get more out of the lecture if you are already familiar with the topic.
- **How:** Review lecture notes from last class.
  **Why:** Provides continuity for the lecture you are about to hear.
- **How:** Attend all classes and always take notes.
  **Why:** Notes from friends may not be as meaningful as taking your own. Also, you may miss points the instructor has emphasized and would not have as good an idea of what the instructor considers important.
- **How:** Sit in the front of the lecture room, close to the speaker.
  **Why:** This reduces the distractions created by others in the room and helps you be more attentive and able to concentrate on what is being said.

During the lecture

*Listen for the main topic, the key points, and the organization of ideas.*

- **How:** Watch for clues from the instructor that help you pick out main ideas. The clues include words like "First . . . second . . ."
  **Why:** Instructors tend to write important points on the board or pause to give time to take notes after a major point is made. Repetition of a point is another clue to what is important.
- **How:** Record lecture notes that highlight the main ideas and that will be clear to you when you review them at a later time.
  **Why:** Legibility and completeness of ideas is necessary to be able to read and understand your notes at a later time. Organized material such as main ideas followed by supporting points is much easier to study and remember than a mass of information running together without organization.
- **How:** Try taking notes on one side of a sheet only.
  **Why:** That way, later in the course you can spread out the pages with only the left summarized columns showing and have a grand overview of the ideas/arguments introduced throughout the course.

*Store and organize your notes*

- **How:** A large loose-leaf binder is best. Each sheet is divided vertically 2 ½ inches from the left edge; notes are recorded to the right of the line.
  **Why:** The large binder gives ample room for notes and allows for easy organization (e.g., insert handouts, etc.). The wide left margin is for later summarizing the main ideas and points in the lecture.

After The Lecture (the same day)

*Clean your notes.*

- **How:** Read through your notes, clarify scribbles, fill in missing information, and emerge with a complete view of the lecture. Then go back and underline or box in words, not whole sentences, that represent main ideas.
  **Why:** Tomorrow you won’t be able to decipher scribbles as well. Underlining as you read leads to underlining too much. Being more selective results in less material to review later.
**Once A Week**

*Review all of the notes you have taken since the beginning of the quarter.*

- **How:** Recite from all your notes, just as described in the previous step. Cover material on the right and recite from words to the left. Schedule 30 to 60 minutes a week per subject for this review.
  - **Why:** Frequent recitations over a period of time are much more effective than one long review just before one exam. With weekly recitation, studies show that you can retain 80% of the material. With no review, you may retain only about 20%.

**Get the Grand View of the Material**

- **How:** Think about what you have learned. Develop a brief, one page outline of the main ideas (i.e., 6-8 major points). Reflect on how the pieces of the subject fit together.
  - **Why:** Often on exams, in essay questions and even in objective questions, you are asked not whether you remember a date or a formula, but whether you understand how major ideas or events relate to each other. Don’t learn only details, but understand main ideas.