

# TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE NOTETAKING<sup>1</sup>

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## A GENERAL NOTE:

Taking good notes during class is an important part of the learning process – even when your instructor provides lecture notes, outlines, or PowerPoint slides. The process of note-taking actually helps you learn and cognitively store the material in addition to providing you with something to review later. Effective note-taking is more than just writing quickly, too! Here are a few tips to help you take the best notes possible.

## BEFORE CLASS

- **Do your assigned readings and review any notes** your instructor has provided for you prior to class. This will help you prepare for the class period and recognize if there are questions you might need to ask or material in need of clarification.
- **Stay organized.** Keep your notes in one place you can easily access later.

## DURING CLASS

- **Pay attention to cues from the instructor and prioritize information.** Instructors often give signals during class about what's important (which doesn't always include saying "write this down, it's important!"). Look for cues such as:
  - Material written on the blackboard or whiteboard
  - Repetition
  - Emphasis through tone of voice, body language, number of examples, or time spent on a subject.
  - Word signals (such as "first, second, third..." or "Now we'll discuss...")
  - Reviews, summaries, lists, and questions
- **Keep your notes brief.** It is time-consuming to write down every single word spoken or provided on a slide! Here are some strategies for efficient note-taking:
  - *Abbreviate.* Think of meaningful ways to shorten words you have to write frequently. (For instance, b/c for "because," w/ for "with," or nat'l for "national"...)
  - Write *key words and shortened phrases* rather than complete sentences.
  - Use *meaningful symbols* when possible. (For instance, use an arrow to indicate results or causality, = to indicate equivalent relationships, or develop your own system!)
  - *Leave space* to fill in additional information if you fall behind.
  - *Make notes for yourself*, such as circling terms you don't understand or writing question marks.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from information from the Academic Skills Center at Dartmouth College and the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan.

- **Make your notes accurate and complete.**
  - Write down *key points, theories, definitions, formulas, facts, etc.*
  - Make note of *diagrams and charts*, and do so correctly.
  - Write down *important examples* connected to key points.
  - Keep your notes *organized*. Try using bullet points, indentations, numbering, outlines, or other graphic organizers (such as charts, matrices, lists, etc.) Date your notes and consider adding page numbers as well.
  - While you should keep your writing brief, this is to allow you to *write as much important information as you can*. Studies show that students who take more notes perform better!

## **AFTER CLASS**

- Review your notes regularly, not just the night before an exam.
- Compare notes with classmates to supplement or clarify your own.
- Identify concepts that are still *confusing or unclear*, and ask your instructor for assistance.
- Reorganize your notes as needed
  - Try summarizing the information or creating additional outlines, diagrams, concept maps, and charts.
  - Use various colored pens/highlighters to help identify important information.
- Evaluate the quality of your notes.
  - Are there lots of errors or gaps?
  - Are they helping you study? If not, think about making changes to your note-taking methods.
  - Ask your instructor or TA to review your notes and make suggestions for improvement.