

The “Cornell System” of Note-Taking

The best way to benefit from notes that you take in class is not to rewrite them at the end of the week. Research shows that your time will be better spent if you take legible and usable notes in class and then spend about 10–15 minutes processing and reviewing them as soon as you possibly can. The Cornell System described below can help you develop an efficient note-taking process.

PART 1: PREPARING YOUR NOTEBOOK

- USE A BINDER AND LOOSE-LEAF PAPER, which will allow you to insert relevant handouts, divide your notes into sections, and reorganize your notes for easier studying.
- USE ONLY ONE SIDE OF EACH PAGE in order to improve legibility and organizational ability.
- CREATE A “RECALL COLUMN” by drawing a vertical line about 3 inches from the left edge of each page. Do not write lecture notes in this column. Leave this column blank for use when processing your notes.

PART 2: TAKING NOTES DURING CLASS

- TAKE LEGIBLE NOTES on the right side of the line that you have drawn.
- FOCUS ON THE MAIN IDEAS rather than on getting down every detail.
- LEAVE SPACE BETWEEN THE MAIN POINTS in the lecture or discussion, so that you can tell later when one point begins and another ends.
- LEAVE SPACE AT THE END of each set of notes for writing questions or reflections.

PART 3: PROCESSING YOUR NOTES

- REVIEW YOUR NOTES AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER CLASS. The importance of this step cannot be over-emphasized. Reviewing after class is the most efficient way to increase the amount that you learn. Read over all of your notes from a given class session.
- AFTER YOU HAVE REVIEWED, USE THE RECALL COLUMN TO RECORD KEYWORDS and phrases regarding the most important ideas from the lecture. Taking this step will help you use your notes much more efficiently.
- QUIZ YOURSELF by covering the notes and using the recall column to jog your memory. Put the ideas and information for each keyword into your own words. If you have a chance, do this again prior to the next class session. It will help prepare you for what’s to come.

Adapted from “Note Taking Tips,” The Learning Center, The University of Wisconsin–Green Bay, online at: <http://www.uwgb.edu/learning-center/resources/note-taking-tips/>.