

READING AND STUDY SKILLS: NOTE TAKING

THE BASIC CORNELL SYSTEM

The three-step Cornell System for taking notes was designed for efficiency. There's no rewriting. Re-coping or retyping your notes is a waste of time. When you create and organize your notes in this three-step way, you'll be doing the right thing from the start. Remember these words: *Prepare, Note, Recall!*

Step 1 - PREPARATION

- Use a loose-leaf notebook. It will allow you to integrate other supporting information, including corrected exams, handouts, etc. Use only one side of the paper. (Later you can lay out your notes to gain an overall view of a lecture, a book, a story, a meeting, etc., —plus you can shuffle the pages into any order you'd like.)
- The idea is to make note-taking an experience where you integrate yourself with what you're investigating. You will think more clearly if your eyes and hands are working together; you'll see patterns and connections.
- Two and a half inches from the left hand side of a page, draw a vertical line down the whole length of the paper.
- The left column is called the **Recall Column**. (We'll discuss the *Recall Column* in **Step 3**.)
- The right column is where you will take your notes. (It's about six inches wide.)

Step 2 - DURING THE LECTURE, MEETING, READING SESSION

- Identify each page with your name, the locale, the date, and a topic heading. Number the pages as you take notes.
- Write your notes in paragraph form.
- Capture general ideas, without writing specific examples. (You can fill in details when you review your notes.)
- Skip a line between ideas or thoughts.
- Use abbreviations to save time. (But don't try to devise abbreviations on the fly; they may confuse you later.)
- For your own sake, *write legibly*. You'll want your notes to make sense next month or beyond.
- Don't bother to try to use formal outlining. Outlining often gives you the impression that you're understanding the subject matter when you really might not. Anyway, you'll spend more energy on trying to get the outlining correct than you will on immediately connecting to the "pith" of the subject matter.

Step 3 - AFTER THE LECTURE or MEETING or READING SESSION

- Try to initiate this third step as soon as you can; here you are organizing, reviewing, and preparing your notes for future use. You'll want to get it all down in an organized way before you forget what you heard or read.
- First read through your notes and make them more legible if necessary. Fill in the spaces you purposefully left blank. Fill in important ideas that you now remember but hadn't written down. Try to clarify things you find unclear or confusing. (Look up facts in a book or *make yourself a note* to ask a classmate for clarification.)
- During the initial read-through draw a box around the central ideas.
- As you review your notes, you may want to use your own numbering system to organize your paragraphs and loose notes into main topics and sub-headings. Use whatever system makes personal sense to you. Experiment.
- Use the left *Recall Column* to jot down/reduce your notes to *key words*. These *key word* should give you the main ideas within the lecture, class discussion, or your reading. Fill in names, dates, and other hard facts from the textbook, sourcebooks, or other reliable sources. Put the author or lecturer's ideas into your own words.
- Take the pages out of your loose leaf book, overlap them so only only the *Recall Columns* are exposed and *Voila!*, you have your review, outline, study notes. You can do this to prepare for class, immediately before the next lecture, before a quiz, or when preparing for midterms or final exams.
- To help you remember what you've heard/read/reviewed/examined, use these pages as a study aid. They will help you prepare for tests, subsequent lectures, etc. Cover up the right-hand portion of your notes. Looking at your short phrases and words in the left *Recall Column*, recite *aloud* the general ideas and concepts of the lecture. (Go ahead, say them *out loud*. No one's around. Integrating mind, body, and speech is a tested, proven aid to success.)
- When working on recalling the details, remember to expand on the key words in the *Recall Column*, including the facts and the connections between the main topics and the sub-topics. Work on how it all fits together. Have fun!