



Careers, Counselling & Pathways Service

TAKING NOTES

Taking notes keeps you active while you are learning. It helps concentration and provides a personal record that will help you to review and remember the material.

WHAT YOU NEED FOR TAKING NOTES

- Loose leaf notepads with holes for filing allow flexible organisation.
- Separate files for each subject or a large folder with dividers to store notes from each day at home.
- Pencils or pens and highlighters - use a few different colours for headings and underlining main ideas and important points.

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN CLASS NOTES

The amount of notes you need to take will vary from class to class. Some subjects such as maths may require fewer notes than history, for example. Some teachers give outlines of the lesson as handouts. Make sure you read these, highlighting, underlining and adding your own notes.

If you are taking notes while the teacher is talking, don't try to write down everything or you will become too bogged down in detail. Be alert and attentive to the main points.

Teachers usually give clues about what is important to write down. Some of the more common clues are:

- Material written on the board
- Repetition of a point
- Emphasis – either by change in voice tone, physical gesture or the amount of time that is spent on a point and the number of examples used
- Word signals such as “There are **two** points of view on ...” “The **third** reason is ...” “In **conclusion** ...” “It is **important** to distinguish between” “on the other hand”
- Reviews given at the beginning of class
- Summaries given at the end of class
- Illustrations or any form of diagram
- Important dates, figures, formulae, etc
- Definitions and quotes
- References, including authors name and publication details.

TIP – Focus your thoughts before a class by previewing the topic of the lesson - some knowledge of the topic makes it easier to take good notes. Identify some questions that should be answered by the end of class as this will help in identifying the main ideas and important information. If your questions haven't been answered you may need to ask the teacher for clarification or further information.

EFFECTIVE NOTE TAKING

You will develop your own style of taking notes and practice will improve your skill in selecting and organising important material. These are some hints:

- Make your notes brief – use point form with key words or phrases rather than sentences.
- Develop your own system of abbreviations and symbols but be consistent.
- Put most notes in your own words as it makes you a more active learner but make sure you don't change the meaning.
- While you are taking notes, question yourself - how does this fit in with what I already know?
- Definitions, specific facts, dates, figures, diagrams and formulae should be noted exactly.
- Include examples to illustrate concepts where possible. Develop a system to distinguish between factual information and illustrative examples. You could use different coloured pens, highlighting, labeling etc.
- Start a new page for each lesson. On both your own notes and on handouts, head your notes clearly with the subject, date, teacher's name and topic. Number the pages in order.
- Try building a framework or skeleton outline into your note taking.

Use HEADINGS

Use Subheadings

Use Paragraph Headings

Use letters (a)

Use numbers (1) or (i)

Indent from the margin and underline for emphasis

- Space your notes out and leave plenty of room for later additions. You may wish to leave a wide margin for extra comments or references.
- If you miss a point, write key words, leave some space and get the information later.
- Ask questions when you have the opportunity to make sure you understand how the information fits together.
- Some students plan to rewrite their notes later, however, if you can get your original notes right you will save a lot of time.
- Develop a buddy system with a class mate who is a good note-taker so that they will copy their notes for you and vice versa if you miss a class. Never lend your original notes.

TAKING NOTES FROM WRITTEN MATERIAL

Exactly what notes you make will be determined by your purpose. For example, if you are seeking a particular piece of information or the answer to a specific question, then that is all you need to record.

On the other hand, if you need to learn the information it will be important to identify the main points and develop a summary that shows how the information fits together. If you are using a copy that can be marked, highlighting and underlining the main ideas will help with your note-taking.

If your purpose is to gather notes for something you need to produce like a presentation, essay, or report, it is probably better to structure your notes in accordance with the structure of what you are going to produce. Look at the plan of your essay or presentation. What information do you need, what questions do you need to answer to in order to complete the assignment? Just locate and record that information.

If you are looking for background information, making a note of the areas covered will help you read attentively and allow you to find the information again quickly if needed later.

Make sure you clearly label your notes with the details of the text you have used. If it will be included in your bibliography or reference list, be sure to include all the details you will need for this.

EDITING AND REVIEWING NOTES

- Carefully edit notes as soon as possible, tidying up handwriting, clarifying abbreviations, and making the notes clearer. Fill in missing information and clarify anything you don't understand by asking your teacher or a class mate or checking in a text book or reference material.
- Write a summary of any handouts you received as well as the notes you made yourself. This is a good opportunity to see how the material fits together and will also help when you go to revise.
- Review your notes regularly.