

Note-taking Strategies Guidebook



MIAMI UNIVERSITY

BERNARD B. RINELLA JR.
LEARNING CENTER

“A man can only attain knowledge with the help of those who possess it. This must be understood from the beginning. One must learn from him who knows.”

George Gurdjieff

“Knowledge is power.”

Francis Bacon

“There is no subject so old that something new cannot be said about it.”

Dostoyevsky

“A man should keep his little brain attic stocked with all the furniture that he is likely to use, and the rest he can put away in the lumber-room of his library, where he can get it if he wants it..”

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

“As the biggest library if it is in disorder is not as useful as a small but well-arranged one, so you may accumulate a vast amount of knowledge but it will be of far less value to you than a much smaller amount if you have not thought it over for yourself.”

Schopenhauer

“Be curious always, for knowledge will not acquire you; you must acquire it.”

Sudie Back

The primary purpose of note taking is to encourage active learning and to prepare study materials for exams. Developing note taking skills should help you organize information into an understandable format that will assist in your studying process.

There are multiple methods for taking notes. To be a successful student at Miami University, you are encouraged to explore and develop your own consistent style of note taking. Your method may differ from other students' and may vary from course to course.

This guide introduces numerous styles of note taking, successful methods for various subjects, ideas for transforming notes into study materials, and resources for further developing your personal approach to note taking.



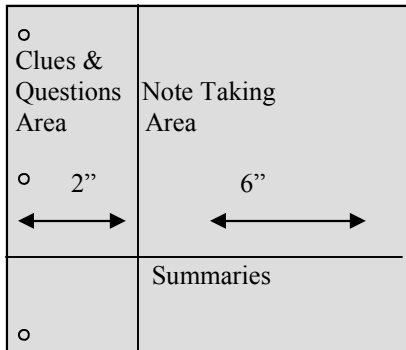
Lecture Notes

The information professors communicate during lecture is extremely important. If a professor is willing to devote time in class to a specific topic, he/she must believe that it is important for you to know and understand. Furthermore, their explanation is probably more understandable and comprehensive than the book. Therefore, it is important to develop a system to record their explanations.

- Decide on a seat in the classroom that minimizes distractions.
- Keep all lecture notes together and in order, preferably in a three ring binder.
- Write as legibly as possible. The clearer you write, the clearer you understand.
- Do not try to write down every word of the lecture. Listen and then paraphrase into your own words (this takes practice).
- Write complete sentences when the material seems important.
- Record all formulas, diagrams, and problems. If it is on the board, overhead, or PowerPoint, it should be in your notes.
- If the professor gives you or posts a copy of the lecture, take notes anyway. Students who actively take notes understand material better.
- Leave blank space in your notes to fill in missing information.
- Condense reading and lecture notes into one complete study guide.
- Use pictures and diagrams to better understand material.

A frequently used method for taking notes is the **Cornell Style of Note Taking**. This method was developed to help students logically organize, understand, and study course material.

By dividing a loose-leaf page of notebook paper into the below sections, create three distinct areas for note taking.



At the top of the page include lecture title, course, professor and date. During the lecture record important information in the note taking area. Take notes in any format (outlining, informal indenting, or short paragraphs), leaving the clues and questions area blank. Include diagrams, illustrations, and questions and answers provided by the instructor.

Review, add, and organize your notes after class. The review will increase your understanding of the material. Fill-in incomplete information, re-write illegible words, number information, and underline important words. In between main ideas fill-in additional information from the book not covered in lecture.

Using the clues and questions area, develop and write study questions and clues to help you remember the information. These questions and clues will aid in preparing and studying for an exam. While studying some students cover up the lecture notes to see whether or not they can recall the important parts of the lecture by answering the formulated questions.

At Miami, we encourage students to create summaries at the end of each section of lecture notes. The summary should include the main components of the lecture and should be brief and objective.

○ General Ideas	Explanation	Examples
○		
○		
○		

Another method of note taking is to divide a page of notebook paper into three columns. In the far left column, write down all general ideas from the lecture. In the middle column explain the idea in greater detail and in the right column record specific facts or examples. This method is called the **University of Alberta System**, but is used by students throughout Miami University.

Two additional note taking methods are the **Two-Column approach** and the **Outline format**. In the Two-Column approach, simply divide your paper into two columns. The left hand column should be used to write down general lecture notes, while the right hand column should be used to designate ideas or problems you do not understand. Some students like to include a list of unknown vocabulary words at the bottom. The Outline format separates your notes into six distinct sections: who, what, where, when, why, and how. Though you may not be able to answer all of these questions for each idea, the outline method encourages you to think about all aspects of each topic.





○ Notes	
○	
○	

○ Who
○ What
○ Where
○ When
○ Why
○ How

Reading Notes

Many students forget to take notes from their textbook or readings. By leaving them out, students often get only part of the big picture. To successfully study and review material for exams, one must completely comprehend both lecture and reading material. Effective reading requires active reader participation, not just scanning the words in hopes that the information will sink in. While reading, you might want to try different strategies for comprehension.

One comprehension strategy is called TEXT MARKING. Marking the text highlights a readings structure, parts, and important details. This process can aid a student in understanding the ideas presented and in developing organized study materials. Below are some recommended and commonly used symbols to mark text.

	Topic
	Subtopic
	Repeatable Category
	Detail
1,2,3...	Sequence
a,b,c...	List

Repeatable categories are categories that are repeated for each topic in a section. Sometimes repeatable categories are obvious in the text, but often students must determine them for themselves. Identifying them takes practice, but when students take the time to do so, they will understand the structure of the passage and more easily connect the information to previous knowledge.

Other comprehension strategies include:

- Raising questions to help you engage with the text and establish connections with previous information.
- Make predictions to encourage you to think ahead.
- Elaborate on ideas by developing examples and comparisons that are not present in the text.

Annotation

Annotation is summing up information in a text or article by writing brief key points in the margins. Annotation is an active reading strategy that improves comprehension and is the beginning of the learning process. It requires students to understand what they are reading and then put the information into their own words.

Students who annotate read to make meaning rather than read to complete the assignment. Annotation encourages students to think about their reading because they have to put the ideas into their own words. In order to do this, students must understand what the text is saying. Though annotation may take longer than passive highlighting, most students end up spending less time studying because they are learning while they are reading and do not need to re-read material later.

How to Annotate

As you read the text, take time to note in the margins or on post-it notes:

- Important ideas in your own words
 - Relationships between concepts
 - Summaries of key paragraphs
 - Your own examples or references
 - Information you do not understand or need clarified
 - Repeated concepts or other signals
 - Potential test questions
- * Make sure you are putting the notes in your own words. By processing the information enough to paraphrase you are gaining a deeper understanding of the material than if you simply re-write what is in the text.
- * Make sure you include notes on individual facts as well as broad, big picture concepts. You need a balance of both in order to gain a deep understanding of the material.

When you have completed annotating the reading assignment, write or recite a 3-5 sentence summary of the assignment. If you are able to articulate the key ideas of the reading then you have read for understanding and comprehension. If you are unable to articulate key ideas you should review your annotations and attempt the summary again. If you are still unable to summarize the reading you should re-read the unclear sections and take additional notes on the reading.

1382 William Carlos Williams

Such a nice man, put in the mother. Look how kind he is to you. Come on, do what he tells you to. He won't hurt you.

At that I ground my teeth in disgust. If only they wouldn't use the word "hurt" I might be able to get somewhere. But I did not allow myself to be hurried or disturbed but speaking quietly and slowly I approached the child again.

As I moved my chair a little nearer suddenly with one catlike movement both her hands clawed instinctively for my eyes and she almost reached them too. In fact she knocked my glasses flying and they fell, though unbroken, several feet away from me on the kitchen floor.

Both the mother and father almost turned themselves inside out in embarrassment and apology. You bad girl, said the mother, taking her and shaking her by one arm. Look what you've done. The nice man . . .

For heaven's sake, I broke in. Don't call me a nice man to her. I'm here to look at her throat on the chance that she might have diphtheria and possibly die of it. But that's nothing to her. Look here, I said to the child, we're going to look at your throat. You're old enough to understand what I'm saying. Will you open it now by yourself or shall we have to open it for you?

Not a move. Even her expression hadn't changed. Her breaths however were coming faster and faster. Then the battle began. I had to do it. I had to have a throat culture for her own protection. But first I told the parents that it was entirely up to them. I explained the danger but said that I would not insist on a throat examination so long as they would take the responsibility.

If you don't do what the doctor says you'll have to go to the hospital, the mother admonished her severely.

Oh yeah? I had to smile to myself. After all, I had already fallen in love with the savage brat, the parents were contemptible to me. In the ensuing struggle they grew more and more abject, crushed, exhausted while she surely rose to magnificent heights of insane fury of effort bred of her terror of me.

The father tried his best, and he was a big man but the fact that she was his daughter, his shame at her behavior and his dread of hurting her made him release her just at the critical times when I had almost achieved success, till I wanted to kill him. But his dread also that she might have diphtheria made him tell me to go on, go on though he himself was almost fainting, while the mother moved back and forth behind us raising and lowering her hands in an agony of apprehension.

Put her in front of you on your lap, I ordered, and hold both her wrists.

But as soon as he did the child let out a scream. Don't, you're hurting me. Let go of my hands. Let them go I tell you. Then she shrieked terrifyingly, hysterically. Stop it! Stop it! You're killing me!

Do you think she can stand it, doctor! said the mother.

You get out, said the husband to his wife. Do you want her to die of diphtheria?

Come on now, hold her, I said.

Then I grasped the child's head with my left hand and tried to get the wooden tongue depressor between her teeth. She fought, with clenched teeth, desperately! But now I also had grown furious — at a child. I tried to hold

Moment of reflection

Does she understand? He is worried about his work.

ANIMAL IMAGE

HE IS NOT A NICE MAN.

TO BE INTENSE!

HOW OLD?

WHY? MARRIAGE?

VIOLENT NATURE!

Pseudo RITE

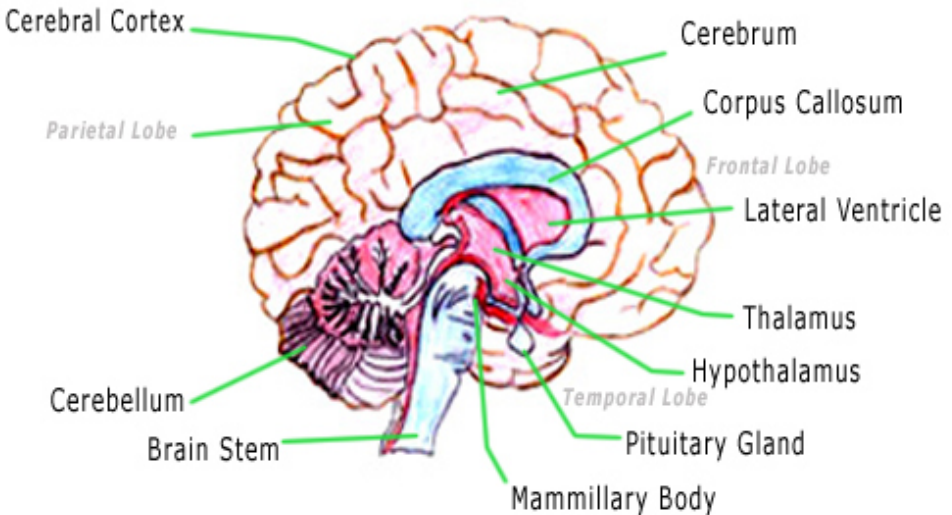
NOTE HER SPEECH LEVEL! HOW OLD IS SHE?

Beyond Taking Notes

Much of the information gathered from readings and lectures are ideas and concepts that are related to each other. Sometimes, however, linear note taking, in the form of outlines or short sentences, does not make obvious these relationships. Turning notes into pictorial representations can help make relationships and connections between ideas and concepts clearer. There are numerous types of representations and each serves its own purpose. Each student, for each subject, should determine which representations are most appropriate and useful.

Diagram

A diagram is a learning representation that can be used to help remember component parts of a whole. Visualizing and labeling will help your brain transfer information from short term to long term memory.

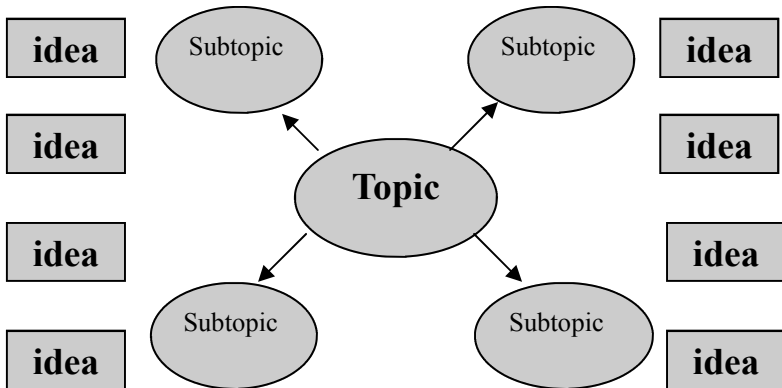


Vertical Section of the Brain

Sketch by Abhishake Sharma

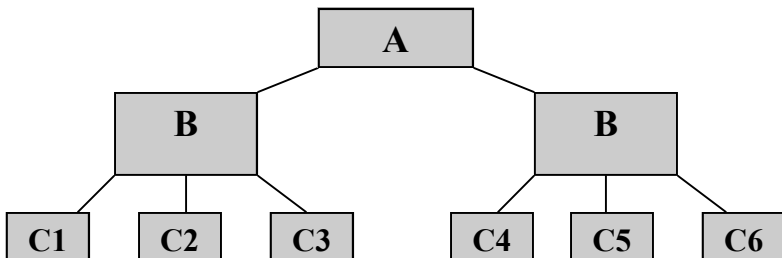
Concept Maps

A concept map places the main idea in the center, with related ideas radiating out from the center. Mapping is most useful for brainstorming or organizing jumbled information.



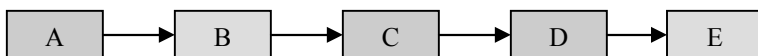
Hierarchies

A hierarchy organizes information into groups and levels based on comparative importance (general ideas placed above more specific ideas). Information is grouped in levels with similar information appearing on the same level. Hierarchies are very useful in science-based classes (BOT, MBI, ZOO, PHY, GLG).



Sequences

A sequence organizes information chronologically from left to right. A sequence can also be thought of as steps, phases, events, or stages. Connect the items in the correct order and time by placing arrows between them. Sequences are often used to study literature and history (ART 187, ART 188, HST 111, HST 296, ENG141).



The Matrix

A matrix can be developed to show relationships between multiple topics and ideas. Sometimes a matrix expands out of a hierarchy or a sequence. On the left of the matrix are the repeatable categories, or those ideas that come up numerous times in the readings and lecture. At the top of the matrix are the common topics within each idea. Many students are familiar with matrices in the form of a spreadsheet or a database.

	Topic	Topic	Topic	Topic
Category				
Category				
Category				

The described strategies for note taking must be customized for each student's learning style and for each course's content. To become a truly successful student at Miami University, dedicate time and energy into developing a system for note taking and use it regularly so that it becomes a habit. Those who engage in active note taking, also engage in active reading and learning that leads to comprehensive understanding.

Resources

There are numerous resources available to you to assist in developing better note taking skills. If you are interested in learning more about note taking please explore the following resources:

Note Taking Websites

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/success/notes.html>
(website featuring handouts and videos on building note taking and listening skills)

http://www.law.harvard.edu/current/student-services/taking_notes.pdf (PDF packet with detailed instructions for several note taking methods)

http://www.ucc.vt.edu/academic_support_students/study_skills_information/index.html (links on left side of page lead to webpages with many helpful tips and suggestions for effective note taking and other study skills)

Notes



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If you are interested in working with a Learning Specialist to better improve your note-taking, test-taking, or general study strategies, please contact:

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