



College Preparation Toolkit

Tips for College Note Taking

With so much information coming at you from every direction, taking good notes is essential for success in college and taking poor notes can have a real effect on your grades. Read on to learn a few essential tips and tricks for making your notes work for you.

Materials

The following supplies can help you take more efficient notes:

- Notebooks or binders (separated by class)
- Graph paper (for diagrams)
- Pencils
- Pens
- Highlighters
- Small sticky notes

Students who have tablets or small laptops may find that a computer is the only tool they need for class notes. However, highlighters and sticky notes will still help these individuals take better notes while reading.

Class Notes

Because you can't write down every word the instructor says, it's important to have a strategy for taking notes in class. (Students who need an exact transcription should consider asking the professor for permission to audio record his or her lectures.)

First, be sure that you're sitting in a place where you can see and hear the professor clearly and clear your space of any distractions that will prevent you from focusing on class. (If you're taking notes on a PC, this may include turning off your wireless so you're not tempted to browse the Internet.) Next, make sure that all of your notes taking materials are easily accessible.

Once class has begun, you'll need to identify what to write down. This will come naturally after a few courses, but in the beginning you may need to put some thought into it. If you've done the reading, you should know what information is in the textbook. You can gloss over that in your notes, simply recording the things that the instructor emphasizes as particularly important.

Information that should typically go into your notes includes:

- Things the professor puts on the whiteboard.
- Facts that you need to memorize, like names and dates.
- Formulae that you need to be familiar with, particularly in math or science courses.
- Details that your professor emphasizes as particularly important. Look out for signal phrases such as 'And most important...' or 'There are five reasons why...'
- And, of course, anything that the professor introduces with the words, 'This will be on the test.'

It's also worth noting (as it were) that you should write in phrases, not whole sentences, and use abbreviations to save yourself an immense amount of time when taking class notes.

Reading Notes

Although most students take class notes in high school, many college freshmen aren't used to taking notes while reading. However, you'll have a lot more reading in college than ever before, and you'll be expected to refer back to specific passages for class discussions, exams and essays.

There are three key methods for taking notes on your readings and they can be used in combination or by themselves, depending on what works best for you.

1. Highlighting or underlining important passages.
2. Leaving small sticky notes on important pages with a line number or other indication of the relevant passage.
3. Writing down main ideas or important quotes in your notebook.

Some students will also record their thoughts in the margins as they read and write down any words they found challenging to look up later.

Organizing Your Notes

Of course, notes are useless if you can't use them to find information later. It's therefore essential to write legibly and keep everything organized. You may find it most useful to develop an organization system that's intuitive to you, but here are a few ideas:

- Write the course name and date at the top of each page just in case some pages get separated.
- Keep all of your class and reading notes for one course together.
- File your notes chronologically.