

How to Take Notes

Note-taking consists of writing effective and detailed notes. Taking good notes in college requires time and attention. To take effective notes, learn to avoid missing something important, writing too much, or even writing down details that might become irrelevant. There are many steps and strategies for writing notes that will help build your knowledge.

Why is Note-Taking Important?

While taking notes can be seen as tedious and overwhelming, it has a wealth of benefits in developing and refining cognitive information:

- The mental processing that occurs when taking notes helps better retain the concepts taught in class.
 - Having these notes written down provides an extra source of information you can check back on later when you need to jog your memory on a certain concept.
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Method: Typed or Handwritten Notes?

In college, you have the option to either write your notes in a notebook or type them in a laptop. Each method has its own advantages and disadvantages:

- **Typed notes:** While it is much easier to jot down just about everything the professor talks about, some professor's use graphs, tables, and other visual aids, which might be more difficult to accomplish on a laptop.
 - **Handwritten notes** can be much more versatile, but they can be time-consuming, messy, and inconvenient, especially for those with injuries or health-conditions. Still, research has shown that students tend to retain information better when writing notes by hand instead of typing them down.
 - Sometimes, using **both** methods is ideal. Handwrite the notes during lecture to strengthen retention, and then type them down later in the day to act as the first level of review and recollection. This will also provide a good database to find certain points in your notes more easily than flipping through pages of handwritten notes.
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Note-Taking Tips and Strategies

Implementing the suggestions below can offer a good foundation for taking competent, useful notes that promote better retention of course material:

- **Sit at the front of the classroom.** Sitting at the front may be intimidating due to feeling more exposed and vulnerable to the professor, but it provides a better way to stay attentive and immersed in lectures, as well as ask questions in class.
- **Be selective with your notes.** Not everything a professor says needs to be written down. It is important to figure out what parts of a professor’s lecture should be annotated and compile them into a short summary. Also, try not to write down information you already know; save that energy for new and unfamiliar material. Try to formulate an outline with the main points of your notes, as this will help you retain the material.
- **Write neatly.** If you choose to take handwritten notes, make sure your handwriting is clean and legible. Otherwise, you could use more mental energy decoding your own penmanship than to retain the content. If you can’t write quickly enough to ensure your notes can be readable, then consider looking into a more suitable note-taking method.
- **Categorize notes by class.** Try to keep a separate notebook/binder tab/computer file/etc., for each class you’re taking notes for. This will help you better organize the material and, in turn, make retaining concepts for each class much easier. You can look into note-organizing programs—such as Microsoft OneNote, Evernote, or Milanote—for assistance in this regard.
- **Avoid multitasking.** It can be tempting to check your phone or click away to another website during a lecture, with the idea that you can multitask. However, multitasking divides your attention between the many tasks, which compromises your notetaking in the process. Keep all distractions to a minimum if possible and dedicate all your focus and attention into taking your notes.
- **Use abbreviations and symbols.** One way to save time when taking notes is to develop abbreviations for certain words or phrases. For example, use “bw” instead of “between,” an ampersand (&) instead of “and,” or use arrows when showing a cause-and-effect relationship. As long as you remember what these abbreviations and symbols stand for, they can go a long way into helping you take down notes faster.

- **Make use of space.** If every single word and point in your notes is the exact same size, it is difficult to distinguish what is important information. Write your main points in a size larger than the rest, leave margin space for any additional notes or illustrations you want to add later, and highlight key terms to help you remember that they should be reviewed.
- **Write down your own conclusions and questions.** Instead of trying to blindly copy down everything your professor says in lecture, think about *why* your professor decided to include the points (s)he has. Think about what important themes and concepts you can interpret from these points. Also, if you get confused about the material, jot them down in your notes in the form of questions so you can ask your professor for clarification later.
- **Incorporate visual elements.** If it's easier to draw out an image or diagram of some parts of your notes instead of writing everything down in text, then go ahead and do so. If possible, you can even snap a photo of a particularly text-heavy PowerPoint slide. However, if you do decide to do this, make sure you write down the notes in that photo later in the day while the information is still fresh in your mind.
- **Review notes regularly.** Make sure you frequently go over the notes you've taken down in class, especially the material given earlier in the semester. This will help refresh your memory, as well as solidify the concepts you learn in class, which will in turn reduce the need for cramming when it's time to take your exams.

An Important Note for Students with Disabilities

If you have challenges taking notes due to a disability, please refer to our TAMIU Disability Services to request accommodations, including an assigned note-taker. You can find TAMIU Disability Services using the following information:

- **Location:** Student Center 124
- **Phone:** (956) 326-3086
- **Email:** disabilityservices@tamiu.edu
- **Link to Webpage:** <https://www.tamiu.edu/disability/>

References:

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Disclaimer: We did not include all of the resources conferred to formulate this handout. We encourage students to conduct further research to find additional resources. The format of this list is not commensurate with a standard format.