

Note Taking Best Practices

Refer to the examples below to view multiple ways to use your notes, as well as the note-taking styles document to help you determine a note taking strategy that works best for you, as well as the courses you are in. Remember, multiple styles can (and should!) be used for your different courses.

10 Ways to Use Your Notes

1. Visit office hours to talk through questions you noted during lecture.
2. Make a study guide.
3. Write a summary of main points.
4. Transform your notes into something visual.
5. Fill in answers to questions that you write in class.
6. Write practice test questions (should be a mixture of short answer, multiple choice, and matching questions).
7. Make and organize post-it notes to help study procedures/systems.
8. Make visual connections between notes from different lectures as the concepts you are learning build on one another.
9. Identify real-world examples of main concepts.
10. Explain the main points from class to a friend who wasn't there.

7 Great Note Taking Strategies

1. Take notes in your own words

- Your working memory stresses less when you think in your own words
- When you try to write down every word the professor is saying, as they are saying it (also referred to as “transcription”), you spend less time learning concepts during lectures

2. Transform your notes after class

- Transforming notes into a summary, diagram, or mind map creates new retrieval paths to your memory
- The test won't look like your notes; using and applying notes gives you practice with the material in different formats

3. Take notes no matter what

- Instructor notes and slides are a good starting point, but your thinking matters!
- Include associations, questions, and details that might not be captured in the slides

4. Take notes by hand if possible

- Note-taking on your laptop can invite multi-tasking and distract from listening and learning
- You can always convert your notes to a digital format later as part of your study process

5. Use consistent abbreviations and symbols

- Using abbreviations and symbols for common words saves time
- It's helpful to develop personal associations; signal these connections with symbols

6. Be open to trying new things

- Visit the Student Success Center in Bolton 120 to meet with an Academic Skills Tutor and talk through which strategies will work best for your courses
- Challenge yourself to take notes in a new style to find what works for you

7. Take notes in all of your learning environments

- Remember that class discussions and student comments are learning opportunities and can spur and deepen your thinking and understanding
- Online activities will be rich with note-worthy material, too (i.e., discussion boards, videos, practice problems, etc.)

Note Taking Best Practices + Troubleshooting

Having a strategy in mind is a great place to start, but what happens when things do not go according to plan and you run into an obstacle? Refer to the scenarios below to see potential solutions to issues that may arise.

What if my instructor talks too fast for my note taking speed?

- Use abbreviations so you can capture information faster
- After class, share and compare notes with friends
- Mark moments you want to return to or add detail to later when studying
- If the lecture is recorded, revisit it later and fill in the details

What if the lecture slides are sparse?

- Write questions you hope will be answered in class
- Look for connections and try to find additional information in your text, online, through work with a study group, etc.
- Use lecture slides as a starting point and add detail from other course content (i.e., the textbook reading; videos; etc.)

No matter what happens, it's a good idea to:

- **PREPARE** before class. Complete the reading and come with your own set of notes so that you know what concepts will be discussed in class
- **MARK** moments you want to return to or add detail to later when you are studying
- **AFTER CLASS**, share and compare notes with friends
- **VISIT** office hours to ask questions you had about the lecture

What if I'm having trouble understanding my instructor?

- Write questions you hope will be answered in class
- Listen for main ideas, key terms, or answers to your questions
- Listen and watch for cues to important information
- Visit office hours to speak with the instructor. The more you converse and listen to someone, the better you get at understanding the figures of their speech

What if I'm not sure what to write down?

- Remember that note taking is a skill, and requires practice! Be patient with yourself. You'll get better at knowing what to write down the more you practice.
- Listen and watch for reference to concepts you read about
- Listen for repetition—often, instructors will say things multiple times or in different ways to emphasize what they want you to know
- Listen for numbers (i.e., “there are 2 ways to think about...”), cues, and specific examples of a concept. All of these can signal important information
- Watch and listen for big ideas or how examples relate to a main point