

Note-Taking Tips for Students

Taking notes in class is one of the most effective ways to understand the material being presented in class. Unless you have a photographic mind, you'll need to learn this important skill. Follow these general guidelines and you'll be a pro in no time!

1. **Come to class prepared.** Always bring enough paper and a writing instrument of your choice to class.
2. **Start a new page for each new class.** Also, put the date on the top of the first page. This way you will know where the notes for each class begin, which will help you keep the material organized. Consider keeping your notes organized in their own binder.
3. **Don't try to write down every word your teacher says.** You will not be able to, even if you can write very fast. More importantly, in trying to do so, you will miss the overall point your teacher is trying to make.
4. **Write down the big ideas.** Listen for facts, connections, and main ideas. This may take a while to get used to, because you will need to divide your attention between listening to the teacher (or other students) and writing your notes. Don't get frustrated. In time, this will become easier.
5. **Use abbreviations for commonly occurring names and words.** You can develop your own abbreviations, so long as you don't forget what they stand for. For example, in a lecture on Einstein, you might write his name out the first time, and then abbreviate it as "E" throughout the rest of your notes. Long words such as government can become "govt" and federal can become "fed." Develop your own system and stick to it, once it works.
6. **Leave lots of room on the page.** When writing, leave ample space between ideas. This is like pausing before you begin a new sentence. Your notes will be much easier to read, and you'll have space to add information later on, if needed. Don't try to cram everything onto one piece of paper.
7. **Use diagrams and pictures where necessary.** Sometimes it is helpful to draw pictures that illustrate the connections between ideas, sequences, or events. Don't be afraid to draw pictures that will help you understand the material.
8. **Write down corresponding page numbers from your textbook.** Teachers often use the textbook to refer to ideas you're learning in class. Recording the page number of corresponding ideas and homework assignments can come in handy later on.
9. **Review your notes for accuracy.** It's a good idea to look over your notes sometime after class for accuracy and completeness. Consider doing this just before doing your homework to get yourself back in the mindset of the material.
10. **Obtain notes for missed classes.** Sometimes it's necessary to miss class, but that shouldn't stop you from getting notes for it. Consider forming a partnership with another student at the beginning of class on whom you can rely (and who can rely on you) for notes when a class is missed. Your teacher may also be willing to share his or her notes with you.