Taking Notes in Class

Taking good lecture notes is essential in college-level courses. Your notes are a written record of lecture material. The physical act of notetaking helps you start to put information into your memory as an active way for your brain to process the information.

These strategies work well for both synchronous and recorded lectures online. If lectures are recorded, make note of questions you have while taking notes to ask during instructor office hours.

Select the strategies that you would like to try out and remember that notetaking is a skill that can be improved through better technique and with practice.

Before Class - Preparing to take notes

These pre-class preparation steps are especially important for classes that provide a great deal of challenging new content. These steps will help you take better notes in class:

- Review your course outline to see what the topic of the lecture will be and start anticipating what might be discussed in class.
- Skim over your notes from the previous class to refresh your memory and get mentally warmed-up for the new material to come.
- Read your assigned chapter *before* class. Notice the new concepts, and especially the new terminology that you will be discussing in class so that you can spell/write the new terms effectively while taking notes.
- * If you do not have time to read the entire chapter or all the assigned pages, skim the text for an overview of the topics and core concepts, and to identify key terms.

During the Lecture - Tips for taking notes in class

- Date your notes in case they get out of order, and so you can match your notes to the course outline the instructor handed out on the first day.
- Write on the front side of your paper only. This keeps notes cleaner and easier to study from so you can spread them out in front of you.
- Adjust your notetaking to the type of lecture your instructor gives. Three examples are listed at the end of this resource.
- Listen for the main ideas and core concepts covered in a lecture and note these as headings.
- Instructors often give clues when they state main ideas or important points. Some of the more common clues are:
  - Introductions and/or summaries given at the start or end of class, such as "Today we will cover . . ."
  - Material written on the board
  - Repetition - the same idea is presented several times
  - Emphasis - this can be judged by a louder tone of voice, slowing down and emphasizing a point, stronger gestures, and/or the amount of time a teacher spends on the topic
  - Word signals; e.g., "It is important to note that..."

- DO NOT try to write down everything that is said as you will get left behind.
  - use your own words to reduce and summarize information
  - use abbreviations and symbols
  - write phrases instead of full sentences
- Write down enough information so that you can understand your notes later.
- Leave space in your notes:
  - between ideas or topics to allow for room for making your notes more complete when you edit later.
- when you miss information. Fill in the missing information later by asking a friend, checking your textbook, or approaching the teacher by asking during the lecture, after class or during office hours.
- Use the PowerPoint notes that the instructor provides for a lecture as a reference, not a substitute for your own notes.
- If the lecture is recorded, take advantage of the ability to pause, rewind and clarify.

After Class - Editing your notes

- Take time to edit your notes soon after the class. This will help you fill in gaps, identify where you still have questions, and have better notes to study from. Editing your notes also helps to learn the material more deeply.
- Some students recopy all their notes–to make them neater and as a way of studying. Instead, spend the time editing, noticing and highlighting main ideas and key points for emphasis, and rewriting only those points that need more clarification.
- The best way to use your notes to learn more deeply is to view them at least 3 times before a test, once when you edit, once again at the end of a week when you review what you covered during the week, and a third time when you study for the test.
- Anticipate and write possible exam questions as you edit your notes. Look at your notes and ask yourself "What question does this information answer?" to create a question-answer system for studying.
- Use the bottom section of your page to summarize the main concepts and most important details. You can do this when you edit your notes soon after the lecture.
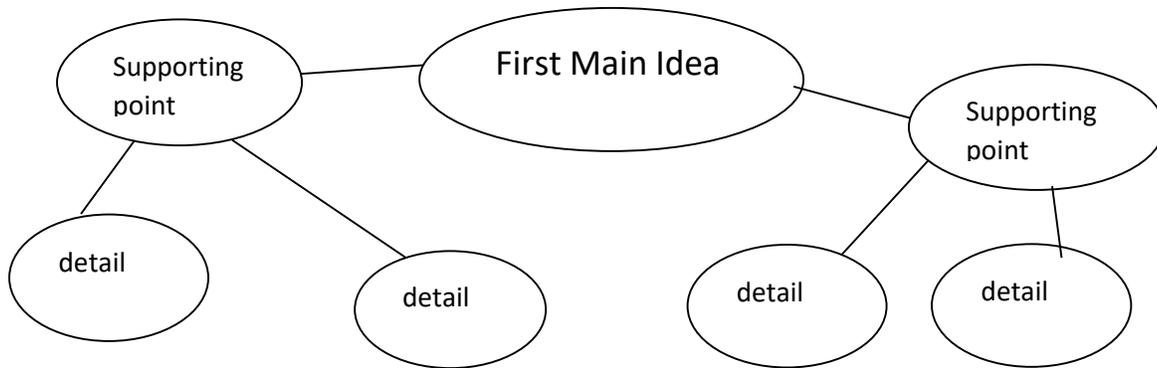

Sample Notes

Here are three examples of different note-taking styles.

1. Outline Format

I. First Main Idea

A. First Supporting Point

1. Supporting Detail

2. Supporting Detail

B. Second Supporting Point

1. Supporting Detail

II.	Second Main Idea

2. Mind-Mapping

If your instructor moves from topic to topic and then back again, you may find it helpful to take notes in this style.

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Supporting          First Main Idea          Supporting
   point                                         point

   detail      detail          detail     detail
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3. Using a modified Cornell note-taking system

	month,day,year
	Genetically Modified Food
	Two views:
What are arguments for GM foods?	1. Pro
	- credible scientists claim next step in animal husbandry
	- not much dif from selective breeding
	- regulatory bodies to ensure safety
What are arguments against GM foods?	2. Con
	- credible sci. say not proven safe
	- world not short of food; prblm is distribution
How is GM food different from selective breeding?	-not being regulated→public not aware of GM foods in stores
Define transgenic	Ecological Impact of GM Foods
	-GM crops not like selective breeding
	- GM crops are "transgenic" – organisms contain DNA from other species e.g. – fish
	gene in strawberries to make cold resistant

Take class notes here.

Add questions and summary here after class when reviewing notes.

Summary: 2 views on whether GM foods are needed, safe, or different from past agricultural practices. GM foods "transgenic"—e.g. fish DNA in strawberries.