Systems Activity 7: Cornell Notes

You might not think that the way you take notes has any effect on how much you might remember or how well you might do on a test or exam.

But a professor at the University of Nebraska has run a range of experiments about note-taking, as well as studied many experiments conducted by others.

The key seems to be the work you do *after you've taken the initial notes*.

Returning to the notes obviously helps, but it's not the reading of those notes that necessarily has an impact – it's returning to *develop the notes* through things like…

- Clarifying material with additional underlining, arrows, subheadings and reminders
- Adding to the material with questions: 'how' or 'why' questions that work like a test, encouraging you to explain what you're reading
- Adding to the material with clarifications you've got from text books/study guides, expanding the material with deeper additional information

…that have such a significant impact. (Some studies show an increase of about 20% in test results if students do this kind of work!)

So can we take notes in a way that helps this process? We can. This note-taking system is called Cornell Notes, (named after an American university.) It looks like this.
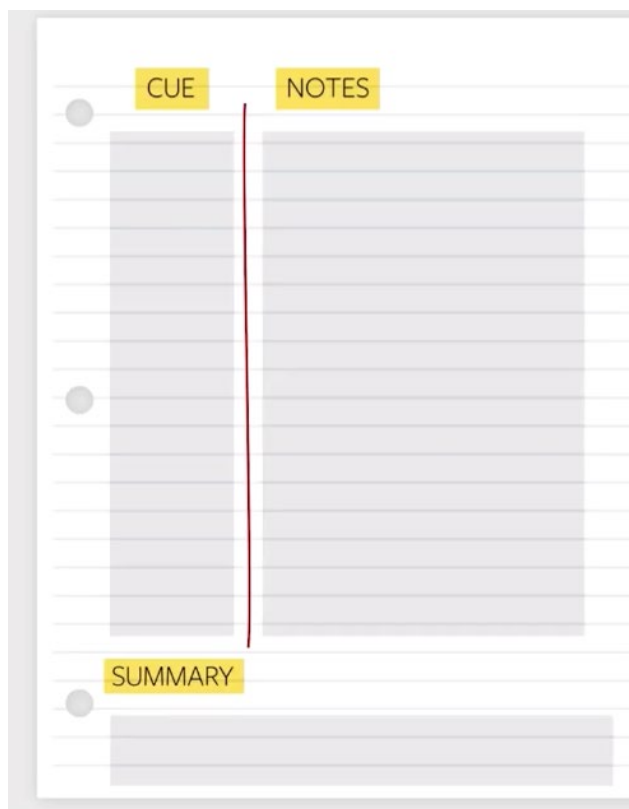
Have a go yourself:

Take your notes as usual in the **'notes'** section of the page during class.

Use the **'cue'** column to add: questions, clarification, reminders, arrows, additional material. You can do some of this work in class, and some of the work afterwards as you revisit your learning.

The *'summary'* section is for you to try and – no surprise here - summarise your learning afterwards. Write two or three sentences of explanation for your future self, so when you return, you've got a clear sense of what the notes cover.