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The Best Note-Taking Methods



For College Students



The Best Note-Taking Methods

For college students & serious note-takers



GoodNotes

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Note-taking is one of the most important activities for students. There are a variety of reasons for it but we only want to highlight the most important one here: Taking notes will help you recall information that would otherwise be lost. And we all know how crucial that can be when we're preparing for an exam. What's the essence of this figure again? Note-taking to the rescue. But taking notes the right way isn't as easy as it sounds. It isn't simply about jotting down everything that you hear. Taking notes is about summarising core concepts as precisely as possible in your own words.

One thing that most of the successful students have in common is that they use a note-taking method. A note-taking method will help you to prepare before the lecture and to

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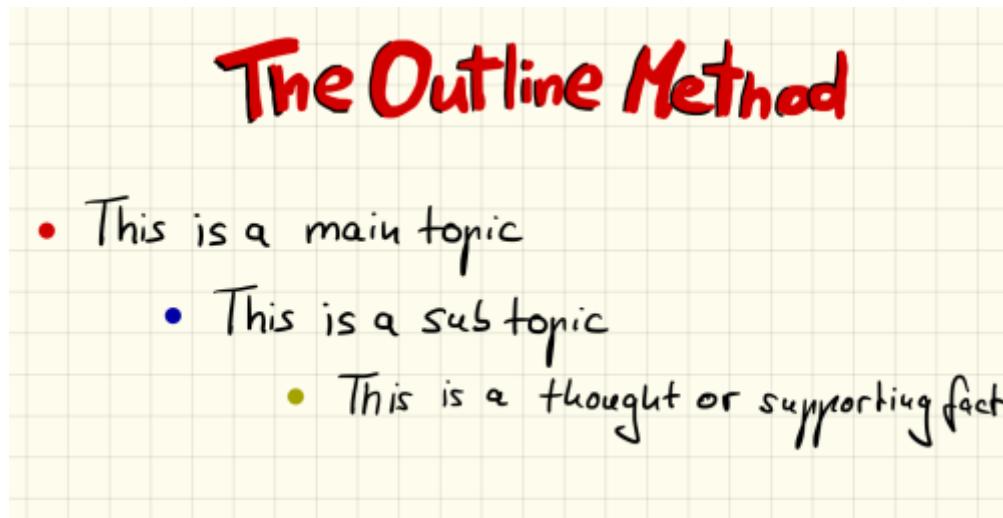
that you don't have to worry about losing the overview once you get back to them to prepare for an exam. In this article, we give an overview of the best note-taking methods for college students, on how to apply them and when you should or shouldn't use them.

Of course, this guide will also come in handy if you're not a college student but want to improve the way you take your notes.

Let's dive in.

1. Note-taking method #1: The Outline method

The Outline method is one of the best and most popular note-taking methods for college students. It lets you organize your notes in a structured form, helping you save a lot of time for further reviewing and editing. As the name suggests, this method requires you to structure your notes in form of an outline by using bullet points to represent different topics and their subtopics. Start writing main topics on the far left of the page and add related subtopic in bullet points below using indents.



When should you use this note-taking method

This method can be used in a variety of situations but works best if the lecture or class follows a relatively clear structure.

Pros

- Highlights the key points of the lecture in a logical way

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- Reduces the reviewing and editing time
- Gives a proper and clean structure to your notes

Cons

- Not suitable for subjects like chemistry and math that comprise of formulas and charts
- Doesn't work well if the attended lecture doesn't follow a certain structure

2. Note-taking method #2: The Cornell Method

We've written about the Cornell Method in one of our previous blog articles. It is a unique note-taking method that finds its application in a variety of situations. What differentiates it from other methods is the page layout. The page is divided into three or four sections starting from one row at the top for title and date (optional) and one at the bottom along with two columns in the center. 30% of width should be kept in the left column while the remaining 70% for the right column.



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A built-in Cornell notes template in GoodNotes on the iPad

All notes from the class go into the main note-taking column. The smaller column on the left side is for comments, questions or hints about the actual notes. After the lecture, you should take a moment to summarise the main ideas of the page in the section at the bottom which will speed up your reviewing and studying process immensely. The best part is that many people already remember and digest the information while they write a summary like this.

When should you use this note-taking method

The Cornell method is ideal for all types of lectures or even meetings.

Pros

- A quicker way to take, review, and organize your notes
- Summarizes all the information in a systematic manner
- Helps in effective learning as it enables to absorb information in a shorter time
- Helps you to extract main ideas
- Cuts down time for reviewing

Cons

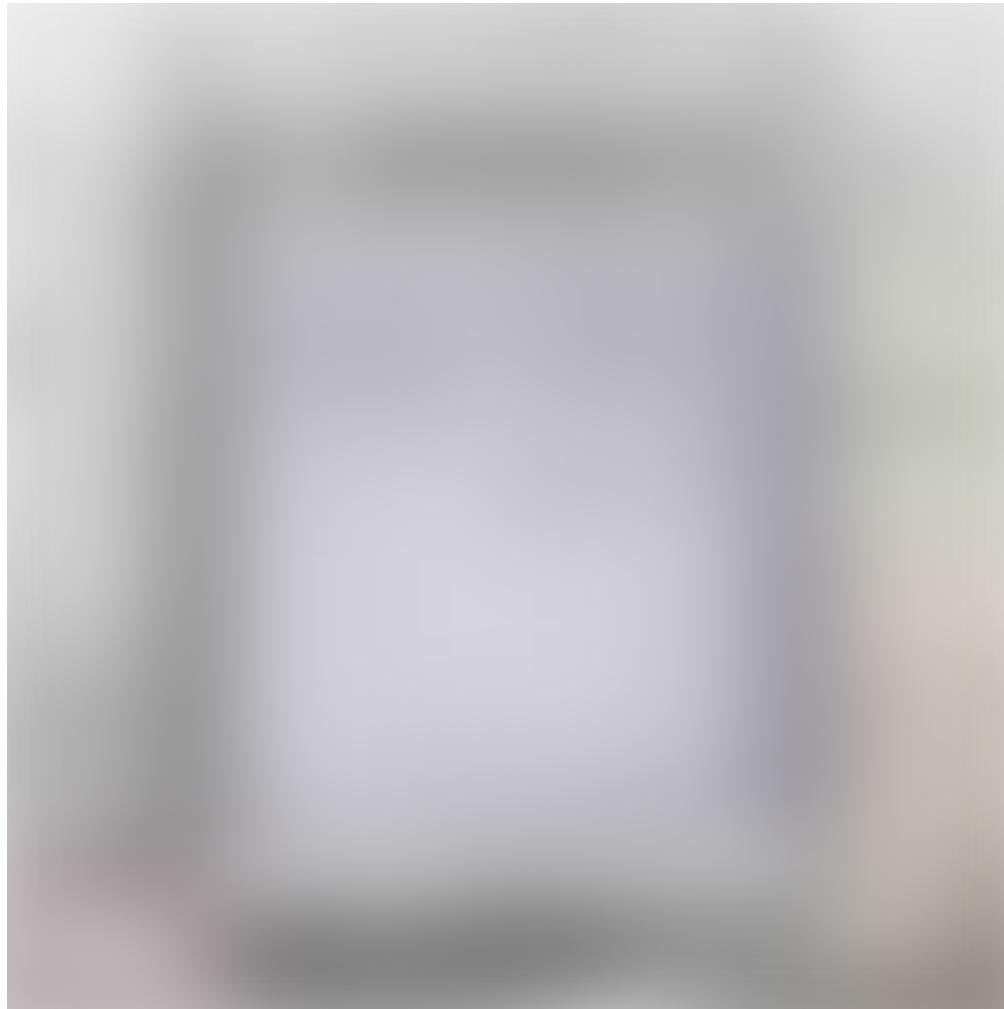
- Pages need to be prepared before a lecture
- Requires some time for reviewing and summarising the key concepts

3. Note-taking method #3: The Boxing Method

This method might be still widely unknown but gains increasing popularity. The term “Boxing Method” has been coined by one of our users, who has written about how she uses the method in a previous article on the GoodNotes blog. All notes that are related to each other are grouped together in a box. A dedicated box is assigned for each

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content on the page can be reordered or resized subsequently. That way, you can just write down notes as you would normally do and then reorder them afterward to assign them to particular boxes. Digital note-taking also allows you to zoom in on the page, which helps to focus on one topic at a time during the review.



When should you use this note-taking method

This method works best if you have a class/session that is split into different sections that are still related in a sense.

Pros

- Segregates and organizes your notes in the form of boxes
- Let's you focus on one box at a time while reading
- Help you memorize the relation between notes in a visual way

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Cons

- Not suitable for every lecture type
- Doesn't work well if no overall topics can be assigned to a group of notes
- Requires additional time to group the notes in the end or during the lecture

4. Note-taking method #4: The Charting Method

It is an ideal method for notes that involve a lot of information in the form of facts and statistics, that need to be learned by heart. The information will be organized in several columns, similar to a table or spreadsheet. Each column represents a unique category which makes the rows easily comparable. A great example of the charting method would be a summary of this article:



When should you use this note-taking method

This is also one of the most-effective note-taking methods for college students when it comes to jotting down heavy content which includes stats and other information. It also

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memorize a lot of information but don't recommend to apply it during classes or lectures. Creating charts with the charting methods takes time. It makes sense to use this method when summarising whole lectures as a preparation for exams or during intensive study sessions.

Pros

- information is clearly structured
- fantastic for reviewing
- notes are easily comparable
- a lot of information can be memorized rather quickly

Cons

- Very time-consuming method
- Barely makes sense to apply this method in a lecture/class where the content isn't clear beforehand
- doesn't work for information that can't easily be categorized

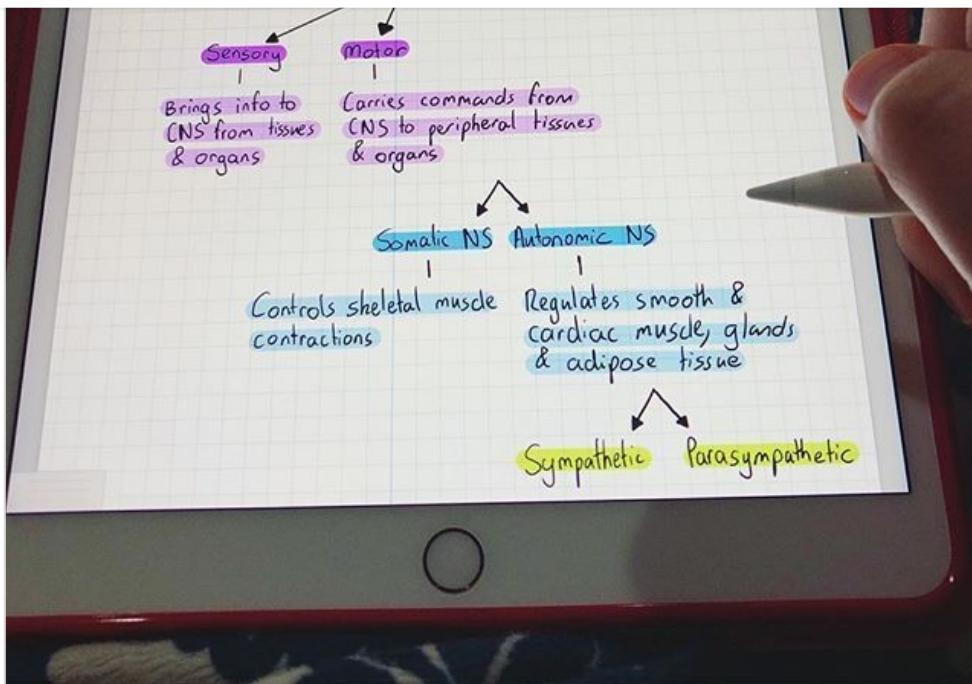
5. Note-taking method #5: The Mapping Method

When the lecture content is intense, the mapping method works best. It helps organize your notes by dividing them into branches, enabling you to establish relationships between the topics. Start with writing the main topic at the top of the map. Keep dividing it into subtopics on the left and right as you go down.



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Using a tree structure to order your notes is a smart way to display relationships between different topics.

Notes taken by [@jordonsjournal](#) in the GoodNotes app

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When should you use this note-taking method

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content of the lecture to be presented.

Pros

- Visually appealing
- Can be used for noting down detailed information but in a concise form
- Allows easy editing of the notes

Cons

- While mapping your notes, you might run out of space on a single page
- Can be confusing if the information is wrongly placed while taking notes

Conclusion

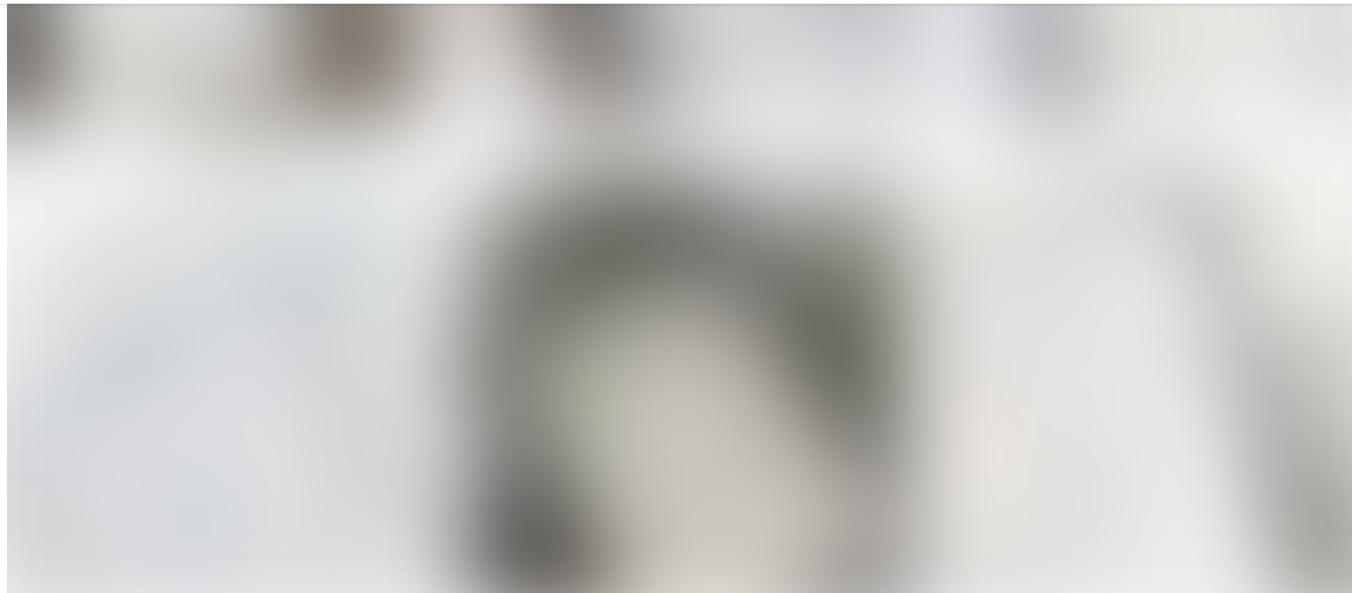
Note-taking is a crucial part of every student's life and the way you do it can have a great impact on your studies and results. If your notes are messy, it can be difficult to review them and find important information before tests and exams. This is why you should consider these 5 different ways to take notes effectively. Not only they will deepen your understanding of the information, speed up your revision, and improve your recall but they will also help you stay disciplined and organized, maximizing your chances to fetch good marks.

If you found this article helpful...

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About GoodNotes:

GoodNotes is one of the most popular note-taking apps for handwritten notes on the iPad. Our users love the digital ink that flows naturally and provides a very similar writing experience to real pen and paper. The app's unmatched versatility makes it a great tool for all sorts of note-taking methods. Especially, the large set of built-in paper templates and the option to add every PDF or image as a custom template, make GoodNotes the perfect companion for your note-taking sessions.

The app is available on the iOS App Store for a one-time payment of USD 7.99 or your local currency's equivalent.

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