Note taking strategies manus

# Why notes?

Taking notes helps you store knowledge.

It’s not just about having something to pull out from the drawer before the exam.

It also helps you retain what you learn in class or read. There are plenty of reasons for looking through your notes occasionally.

This graph shows how the amount of remembered subject matter recede over time. The curve is of course indicative, but none the less it gives a general idea of how much you can improve your memory by frequently skimming your notes.

After 10 minutes you start forgetting what you’ve read or learned in class and if you don’t recap, most of it will be forgotten within a month.

On the other hand, if you run through your notes within a short amount of time you will most likely remember more. It demands a small effort, but there is a lot to gain.

If you recap the subject using your notes just once, it’s more likely to stick.

The effect continues by repetition and, as the graph shows, also strengthens retention in the long run.

If you frequently run through your notes, you can drastically improve your learning outcome, while avoiding the feeling of having wasted your time in class.

But there’s even more benefits of taking notes.

It keeps you concentrated and helps you stay focused on the subject matter, thus preventing your mind from wandering.

Note taking also strengthens your comprehension, selection and overview and enables you to better understand what you hear or read, because you simultaneously process and emphasize key points.

# Reading

Well-made reading notes will keep you from having to read the same text twice, as you already have highlighted important passages and noted key points the first time.

While taking notes you reflect upon what you’ve read, which improves understanding and engages your prior knowledge of the subject.

Simply put; you can write notes in the margin –if it’s your own copy, of course.

Note what the passage is about and if you have further questions you need to check up on or ask your teacher about.

You can also highlight important words or sentences. This enables you to quickly find relevant passages or topics later on. Be careful not to highlight too much. As a rule of thumb, you should only mark what is essential: key terms, concepts, definitions and conclusions. Remember: Quality rather that quantity. A little goes a long way.

If you want to advance your reading notes system, you can use color-coding or post-its to indicate essential pages or chapters.

Finally, you can decide to write a short resumé. But of course, that depends on your purpose with reading the text. It might not be necessary.

# Lecture

If you want to get the most out of your lectures it is important to take good notes. It will always pay off to take notes during class, even if your teacher shares the slides with you or use the black board.

Research proves that taking notes increases your learning as you process the subject matter more thoroughly when you write notes. You can say that notes relieve your memory so you can spend more energy on understanding.

When you take notes, you activate your prior subject knowledge and process the topic while writing, which enhances both learning and understanding. Simultaneously, you structured your knowledge while writing and can therefore use the notes later on in exam preparation or written assignments.

There are several note taking methods and it is important to choose one that is right for you.

Some note down most of what the teacher says, and others simply note down keywords. A good strategy is often to go for quality rather than quantity. Don’t just write everything but consider what might be important for you to know in your specific profession. This keeps you active and enables you to process what you learn more efficiently.

If you just passively write down everything without any selection, this will diminish your learning outcome.

In order to be an active note taker, multitasking is an important skill. You need to note while listening to the teachers. This can be difficult at first, but with a little practice you will get the hang of it. It is therefore important to prepare for class. The more you know about the topic in advance, the better your notes and ability to multitask will be.

When you write notes make sure to use your own words. This way you make knowledge your own and you will better remember and relate to the subject matter. It is of course important to note key subject terms accurate. Use abbreviations to save time and get a better overview.

Finally, it’s up to you if you prefer writing by hand or using a computer. If you use a computer be careful not just to write down everything the teacher says. When you write on a computer you might tend to do so, as most people write faster on a computer than by hand. Computers can also be distracting and cause you to procrastinate because of social media, games and the like.

Remember, practice makes perfect, but most importantly: choose the note taking technique that suits you.

# Visual

When you take notes, it can be a good idea to use words and drawings in combination, as it activates both hemispheres simultaneously. Often, you will primary use your left hemisphere when studying, but if you enrichen your textual notes with a visual element your brain will think more holistically and increase your understanding of complex topics. Just like a picture says more than a thousand word.

There are many different techniques to taking visual notes but common for all is that you needn’t be an artist to add a visual spice to your notes.

To illustrate a process or get an overview of a circle of events, you can use a simple timeline. It could be a company’s development with important events as markers.

A tree diagram is an excellent choice to illustrate hierarchical relationships as in an organization or a process with various branches.

A mind-map is excellent to illustrate how a topic relates to sub- and key topics, and could as an example depict a concept, a person or a brand.

Sketchnotes is a newer trend. The internet is full of impressive examples, but it needn’t be so advanced. Basically, you can create your own system from a small set of principles. Besides the benefits of holistic thinking it can also give you a better overview and save time.

An example could be something important, something very important, your own idea, a reference from a teacher, something difficult you need to check up on, something you need to look further into or something completely different.

Use it as a method to get a better overview and personalize your system.

# Methods

There are many different methods for taking notes, which generally falls within two categories: hand written and digital.

One obvious benefit of taking notes on paper is that you can express yourself more freely and less constrained than with digital notes. This is particularly relevant if you are a visual learner who draws illustrations and models.

If you write notes by hand it can be a good idea to organize the paper for at better overview. There are plenty of methods for doing so, for example the Cornell method, but the name isn’t important as long as you have a system.

Write key terms in the margin and indent the notes to easily find the key points. Create your own note taking language with abbreviations and use a system of icons for a quick overview. If you take notes by hand it is recommended to have a system for organizing the notes. Mark for example the header with course, topic and date.

Hand writing notes can be a great choice if you are easily distracted by social media, games and the like. Some research even indicate that you remember the subject matter better if you write by hand.

But it can be hard to organize your paper notes and they can be difficult to edit and search for.

Fortunately, a lot of programs let you combine hand writing with digital. There are many options which varies from simple text editing to dedicated note taking programs. Use one platform for everything that makes it easier to organize and search. If you use a cloud service, you can take notes on whatever is available – laptop, tablet, phone, etc. Some programs can scan hand writing to digital letters. When you work digitally, it is easy to organize notes into categories and color-codes, plus it makes searching easier. Furthermore, you can save powerpoints, images, videos, etc directly in your notes.

So, it doesn’t have to be either/or, but no matter what strategy you choose, it can be a good idea to look through them occasionally, as it helps you retrieve and understand the subject matter better. Most importantly: find the method that works for you! If you can’t use everything, consider trying out different techniques and customizing them to fit your own note system.