Effective Note Taking Strategies

A lecture can contain quite a bit of information, and taking notes helps you to retain that information and identify which points are most significant. Notes are not a substitute for going to class. Instead, not taking during a lecture can greatly enhance your learning.

General Tips

- Instead of trying to write down everything your professors say, take notes that summarize important components of lectures. Create abbreviations for frequently used words so that you don’t spend as much time writing.

- Don’t worry about your writing style when taking notes. Only you need to understand it; the important thing is getting it down.

- Make sure that you still listen to lectures while you write. Notes should be brief and plainly written so that they do not distract you from understanding concepts.

- Review your notes within 24-48 hours. If you find your notes incomplete or confusing, don’t be shy to ask a friend or your professor for clarification of course concepts. This will help you learn the material as well as identify any gaps in your notes.

- If notes are available online, use them, but don’t rely on them. Bring a printout of notes to class, and add any extra comments that might come up over the course of the lecture.

- If you type faster than you write, try bringing a laptop to class. Stay on task; don’t give in to digital distractions.

- While reviewing your notes, highlight the most significant points and make jot notes in the margins. If you’re a visual learner, you may want to try reinforcing ideas using diagrams or concept maps.

Be patient. Taking good notes requires practice. The more you use your notes for studying, the more you will understand how to take notes that benefit your particular way of learning.
The Cornell or 2 Column Method

1. Divide your page into two columns, with the one on the right being a little more than twice as large as the one on the left.

2. Use the right column to take notes during class, starring the points that you find most significant.

3. After class, write cue words in the left column for every significant point. Each cue should connect to content in the right column. For example, if you took notes for a lecture on the laws of derivatives, you might have cues like “power rule” or “quotient rule.”

Example of the Cornell Method:

Tips:
- When studying, cover up the information in the right column. Try to recall this information by using the cues in the left column.

- If you are able to say the information aloud, then you probably know it. To be sure, try to come up with applications of the information. In the example used above, you might try to solve a problem where the power or quotient rule is applicable.

Remember that taking notes effectively depends on the learning style of each individual. Some people need detailed notes in order to learn class material; others learn more efficiently when they take high level notes and spend their energy listening to the lecture. The most important thing, as with any study skill, is to experiment with different styles and find what works best for you.

Experiment and Be Creative!

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