Note Taking Strategies

There are a variety of effective strategies you can use to take notes. A good note taking strategy will help you identify and organize the most important concepts and ideas described in your textbooks or discussed during your lectures. It will also save you time when you are reviewing and preparing for your exams. This handout provides three different examples. Try out different strategies until you find one that works for you.

The Cornell System / Split Page Method

**Step 1 - Prepare**
- Draw a vertical line about 5 cm. from the left edge of the loose leaf page (do this on several pages).
- Take your notes on the right side of the page only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recall Column</th>
<th>Note Taking Area</th>
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**Step 2 - Record**
- Write your notes in the "note taking area"
- Make notes in simple sentences or point form.
- Skip lines to separate ideas.
- Use symbols and abbreviations.
- Write legibly.

**Step 3 - Reduce**
- Edit your notes immediately after your class or upon finishing your reading.
- Use the "Recall Column" to jot down key words or phrases that will stand as cues for the ideas and facts on the right. This is the organizational framework of your notes.

**Step 4 - Recite**
- Cover the "Note Taking Area" and use the "Recall Column" to help you recite the ideas and facts you wrote down.
- Recitation is the key to remembering information.
**Step 5 - Review**
- Spend 10 minutes every week reviewing your notes and you’ll retain most of what you’ve learned.

**Mind Mapping**

To make a mind map, start in the middle of the page, with the main idea. Work in all directions writing down key words and images that represent the supporting ideas. The result is an organized structure composed of key words, lines, arrows, circles, squares etc. that show the relationships among ideas.

**Advantages of Mind Mapping:**
- Forces you to recognize, key ideas and think about their relationships ~ active learning
- Limits the amount of notes you need to take.
- You organize the material you are learning ~ improved recall.
- Words and Ideas that are closely associated are recalled together.
- Visual images are easier to recall than words. (Try enhancing the visual appeal of your mind map by using colour, different printing styles, shading and shapes. Things that stand out are easier to remember).

**Outlining or Heading**

Outlining is the most common method students use to take notes, but they often write down too much. Outlines should only contain the key words and ideas presented during the lecture or in your textbook. This method is advantageous for recording material that is well organized and presented in a linear fashion.

For example:
1. Animals
   a. Wild
      i. Dangerous
         1. Lions
         2. Tigers
         3. Hawks
         4. Bears
      ii. Domestic
         1. Housecat
         2. Family dog
         3. Caged Birds