Kortschak Center *for* Learning and Creativity

USC University of Southern California

Optimizing Student Note-taking

Mueller and Oppenheimer (2014) is a well-cited study that tested recall and performance for groups of students that took notes by hand or on a computer. Even though the results are often stated as "taking notes by hand is better" let's look at why.

The study was able to find that students that took notes by hand were:

- **More likely to summarize what they were learning**, which engages critical thinking skills.
- **Less likely to take verbatim notes**, demonstrating understanding of significant concepts.
- **Less likely to be distracted from internet browsing/being off-task.**
    - Which may also decrease distraction of peers (Sana, Weston, & Cepada, 2013)

Many students come to college without sufficient note-taking skills and could benefit from a review of self-regulating note-taking strategies, whether using an electronic device or written longhand (Dembo & Seli, 2016). Even though current college students are mainly Generation Z/iGeneration and considered self-educators, they, as well as nontraditional students, transfers, veterans and first-generation students, may need assistance to learn proper note-taking skills.

Take a few minutes at the beginning of the semester to review the tips below:

- Remind students to complete all pre-class readings and activities
    - Ensure students do this is by integrating active learning or flipping your class.
        - For more information in how to integrate active learning strategies into your classroom, contact CET.
- When taking notes, keep them organized in one format and in one place
    - Note-taking applications: Evernote, Microsoft OneNote, Paper (for iPad)
    - Electronic storage suggestions: Folders, Google Drive, Drop Box
    - Note-taking methods: Outlining, Cornell Method, K-W-L Chart
- Highlight the importance of summarizing and paraphrasing and not writing out verbatim what you say. Faculty may need to scaffold at the beginning of the semester and help students learn how to reflect on the most important and least important parts of a lecture.
    - For assistance with effective lecture and slide design, please contact CET.
- Ensure that all notes have dates at the top of the page to remain organized. Additionally, identify a portion of each page to leave blank for comments, clarification and thoughts later on.
- If using a laptop, make sure to stay focused and on-task, avoiding multi-tasking
    - Review KCLC "How to Effectively Use Technology" Handout
- After class, spend 5-10 minutes reviewing your notes to make sure they are organized and coherent. If issues arise, have them contact you or TA's for assistance and questions

Please refer to the "Note-taking Strategies for Students" Handout found in the USC Kortschak Center for Learning and Creativity Tools and Resources page to support further discussion of note-taking principles with students (see below for reference).

References:

- Dembo, M., & Seli, H. (2016). *Motivation and learning strategies for college success: A focus on self-regulated learning.* 5th edition. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Morehead, K., Dunlosky, J., Rawson, K. A., Blasiman, R., & Hollis, R. B. (2019). Note-taking habits of 21st century college students: implications for student learning, memory, and achievement. *Memory*, *27*(6), 807-819.
- Mueller, P. A. & Oppenheimer, D. M., (2014). The pen is mightier than the keyboard: Advantages of longhand over laptop note taking. *Psychological Science, 25*(6), 1159- 1168.
- Sana, F., Weston, T., & Cepeda, N. J. (2013). Laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers. *Computers and Education, 62*, 24-31.

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Note-Taking Strategies for Students

Taking effective notes in class is a skill that can be practiced and improved upon throughout your journey through college. Listed below are tips that assist students in selecting main ideas and creating structures that support knowledge acquisition and retention.

1. Complete readings before class

Being familiar with the material helps in differentiating what is important from what isn't when in lecture.

2. Keep notes organized in one place

Store notes electronically (i.e. Dropbox, Google Drive, Evernote) or in hard-copy (i.e. notebook or binder) to improve access and reduce misplacing them.

3. Insert the date and leave empty space

Create a habit of dating each page for easy reference later, and identifying a section for additional comments, clarification and thoughts that may arise later.

4. Avoid multitasking

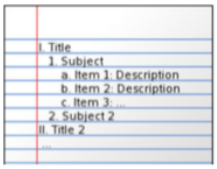
To process and encode information into long-term memory requires undivided attention. For additional suggestions, please refer to the KCLC handouts, "Tips and Strategies to Enhance Concentration" and "How to Effectively Use Technology"

5. Summarize and paraphrase

Focus on capturing main ideas and themes of what is being taught instead of trying to take notes verbatim. Writing every word that you hear is an ineffective method of learning

6. Review your notes after class

Immediately after class, clarify questions and check that your ideas flow and are easy to follow. In addition, review notes again before the next class to help with memory retention.



7. Outline

Use numbers, letters, Roman numerals, bullet points or indentations to organize information into categories and subtopics, in order to improve knowledge acquisition and retention.

8. Use the Cornell Method

If you're unsure of how to take notes, refer to the KCLC "Cornell Method" Handout, which separates your page into key points, general ideas and a summary.

9. Use the KWL method

Improve note-taking organization by adding 3 columns to your sheet that are labeled,

- What I **know**
- What I **want** to know
- What I **learned**

Dembo, M., & Seli, H. (2016). Motivation and learning strategies for college success: A focus on self-regulated learning. 5th edition. New York: Taylor & Francis.