

# Notetaking Strategies, or “Yes, you do have to write this down”

El Rancho High School  
Professional Development Team

Greg Smith

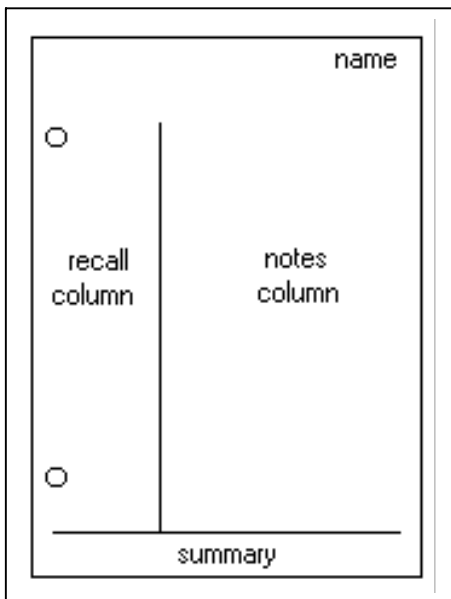
## Notetaking Strategies

### Formats for Notetaking

#### Cornell Notes:

With the Cornell method, different parts of the notebook paper have different functions. Notes are recorded on one half, key words and concepts are recorded in another area called the recall column, and a summary is recorded at the end of the notes.

The Cornell method of notetaking offers several advantages. It results in more organized notes. It allows students to quickly identify key words and key concepts from a lecture. The notes can easily be used as a study guide for exam preparation. The arrangement of information is aesthetically pleasing and easy to scan, making it easy to locate particular pieces of information. The strategy may be adapted to a number of presentation formats.



#### Directions for Cornell Notes:

##### 1. Divide the paper

- Use loose leaf notebook paper and write on one side of the page only.
- Divide the paper vertically by drawing a line from top to bottom about 2" from the left side of the page.

##### 2. Documentation

- Write the following information at the top of each page: student name, course, date, and page number.

### 3. Record notes

- During lecture, record the main ideas and concepts on the right side of the page. This is the notes column.
- Rephrase the information in your own words before writing it down.
- Skip one line between ideas and several lines between topics.
- Avoid writing in complete sentences; use symbols and abbreviations instead.
- The format or style of the notes can vary, but avoid using a formal outline.
- Suggestions for organizing the notes are:
  - Paragraph Style: For unstructured information, record notes in paragraph style with short, telegraphic sentences and phrases.
  - Topic and Ideas Style: For expanded topic information, record topics and ideas.
  - Sentence Style: For ideas and concepts, record notes in short sentences.
  - Definition Style: For main topics and features, record definitions and explanations of words in short phrases.

### 4. Review and Clarify

- As soon after class as possible, review the notes in the right column and clarify any ambiguous information.
- Compare the information with the book and/or other students' notes.
- Then pull the main ideas, concepts, terms, places, dates, and people from the right column and record them in the left-hand recall column.

### 5. Summarize

- Prepare a summary of the lecture material and record it at the end of the notes.
- The summary may be in sentences or short phrases. It should include only the main ideas from the lecture.

### 6. Study

- Use both sections of the notes to prepare for quizzes and exams.

Amy Cohen		9/10/94
The Near East		p. 4
Jericho	<b>JERICO</b>	
○	- 1st city developed	
	- before Jericho people were mobile	
○	Three req'ments for dev'ment of cities	
	1. Water = 1st req'ment	
○	- cities built by lakes, rivers	
	2. Agriculture = 2nd req'ment	
	- division of labor: women planted, men hunted	
○	3. Protection = 3rd req'ment	
	- walls of Jericho built to protect farms and water from invaders	
	- walls built 7800 BC	
○	- city survived 800 yrs	
SUMMARY: Jericho is significant as first city. Requirements for dev'ment of cities are water, agriculture, protection.		

## Outline Format

Overview: The outlining strategy involves organizing information so that information is arranged from general to specific. The format may be used while recording notes, or it may be employed when recopying and reorganizing notes.

Outlining is a good format for organizing notes because it can be modified to accommodate personal needs and preferences. Outlines can be formal or informal (e.g. with or without Roman numerals). Notes in outline form help to show relationships and associations among different pieces of information. Notes in outline form can also be modified easily into study guides for exam preparation.

Directions for taking or transcribing notes into outline form are given below.

### 1. Arrangement of Information

- Each major section of the outline should cover one major topic.
- Arrange the information within the section from most inclusive to most exclusive, indenting the information each time the level of inclusiveness changes.
- All of the levels may or may not be used.

### 2. Symbols

- The most common symbols used in outlining are Roman numerals, upper and lower case letters, and numbers.
- Other symbols like circles and squares may be added or substituted for these according to personal preference.

### 3. Record Notes

- Short phrases, symbols, shorthand, and abbreviations may be used to record notes in the outline.
- Drawings or figures may be incorporated to the right of the notes or between lines.

See reverse for an example of the outline format

## ORIGINS OF AGRICULTURE

- I. AGRICULTURE COMPARED TO HUNTING-GATHERING
  - A. Advantages of Agriculture
    - 1. More efficient use of land
      - a. agric: 1 sq km supports 50 people
      - b. h-g: 25-30 sq km supports 5-6 people
    - 2. More Stable food source thru year (w/ storage)
  - B. Disadvantages of Agriculture
    - 1. Malnourishment
      - a. farmers often deficient in protein
    - 2. Labor intensive in critical seasons
    - 3. High risk if crops/herds fail
- II. IDENTIFYING DOMESTICATES IN ARCH'L RECORD
  - A. Plants
    - 1. Seeds are bigger in size
    - 2. Seed coats are thicker
  - B. Animals
    - 1. Size changes
    - 2. Finer or thicker fur
    - 3. Different horn shape

## Hybrid Cornell Notes / REAP Strategy

REAP stands for Relating, Extending, Actualizing, and Profiting (Devine, 1987). The purposes of the strategy are to organize notes and to make course content more personal to students. Class notes are taken on one side of the paper and the opposite page is used for recording memory triggers and related information.

Directions for the REAP strategy are as follows.

### 1. Divide Paper

- Use a spiral notebook or a three-ring binder with loose-leaf paper.
- Divide the left-hand page into two columns by drawing a vertical line from top to bottom. Label the left column "Triggers" and the right column "REAP."
- Leave the right-hand page as is. Include the student name, course, date, and page number at the top of the right-hand page.

### 2. Record Notes

- Takes notes only on the right-hand pages.
- During lecture, record the main ideas and concepts on the left side of the right page. This is the notes column.
- Rephrase the information in your own words before writing it down.
- Skip one line between ideas and several lines between topics.
- Avoid writing in complete sentences; use symbols and abbreviations instead.
- The format or style of the notes can vary
- Suggestions for organizing the notes are:
  1. Paragraph Style: For unstructured information, record notes in paragraph style with short, telegraphic sentences and phrases.
  2. Topic and Ideas Style: For expanded topic information, record topics and ideas.
  3. Sentence Style: For ideas and concepts, record notes in short sentences.
  4. Definition Style: For main topics and features, record definitions and explanations of words in short phrases.

### 3. Record Triggers

- The trigger column is used to record words, phrases, or visual images that will trigger the corresponding main idea in the notes section.
- Fill in this section immediately or shortly after class.







### 4. Review and Clarify

- As soon after class as possible, review the notes and clarify any ambiguous information.
- Compare the information with the book and/or other students' notes.

### 5. Record REAP Words and Ideas

- The REAP column should also be filled in immediately or shortly after class.
  - In the REAP column, the student writes words or phrases that . . .
    1. . . . **R**elate the material to his/her own life
    2. . . . **E**xtend the material outward into the outside world
    3. . . . **A**ctualize the material; note how information might work in the world
    4. . . . consider how the student and society might **P**rofit from the ideas
6. Summarize
- Prepare a summary of the lecture material and record it at the end of the notes.
  - The summary should cover the main ideas presented in the notes. Another paragraph should include a reaction to the topics addressed in the notes.

Triggers	REAP	name
		Class Notes

TRIGGERS	REAP	Marcus Black Astronomy 1/7/95 p. 1
	geology class ○	○ BIG BANG THEORY - creation of universe from initial speck of matter, 10-15 billion yrs ago
	sound of train whistle ○	○ DOPPLER EFFECT - shift in wave freq due to mvmt of objects
	Milky Way - our galaxy ○	○ GALAXY - lg collection of stars, dust & gas w/ some structure: elliptical  spiral  barred spiral 

## Shorthand Suggestions

- Use standard abbreviations and leave out periods. Examples: eg example, dept department, NYC New York City
- Use just enough of the beginning of a word to form a recognizable abbreviation. Examples: assoc associated, ach achievement, info information
- Omit vowels from the middle of words, retaining only enough consonants to provide a recognizable skeleton of the word. Examples: bkgd background, mvmt movement, prblm problem
- Use 'g' to represent 'ing' endings. Examples: decrg decreasing, ckg checking, estblg establishing
- Spell out short words. Examples: at, in, to, but, as, for, and key
- Leave out unimportant verbs. Examples: is, was, were
- Leave out unnecessary articles. Examples: a, an, the
- If a term, phrase, or name is initially written out in full during the lecture, initials can be substituted whenever the term, phrase, or name is used again. Example: El Rancho Unified School District ERUSD
- Use symbols for common connective or transition words. Examples: & and, w/ with, w/o without, vs against
- Create your own set of abbreviations and symbols. You may wish to develop separate sets of symbols and abbreviations for different courses or subjects.

## Other Symbols and Abbreviations

- as a result of / consequences of <--->
- resulting in --->
- and / also +
- equal to / same as =
- following ff
- most importantly \*
- less than <
- greater than >
- especially esp



## Color-Coding

Use different color highlighters or pens to draw attention to different types of information after the notes have been written down. This is especially good to use to review key terms and concepts prior to an exam.

## Text Notetaking

Students should take notes based upon the texts that they read. Doing so improves attention and concentration, which in turn positively impacts registration of information in memory. Text notetaking encourages students to identify the main ideas and supporting details of the reading in order to better understand relationships among ideas and the overall organization of the text. It results in a shortened version of the assignment with all the essential information needed for future exam review. Finally, text notetaking reinforces learning of the material being read, and it makes reading a more active process.

### Suggested Strategies

- Finish reading before taking notes.
  - While it is not necessary for students to read the entire chapter before taking notes, you must finish titled sections or long paragraphs before selecting main ideas and paraphrasing. It is difficult to know what to record unless you have enough information from which to choose.
- Know what to record.
  - Identify major topics based on section headings. Try to pick out one major idea per paragraph along with a few supporting details. Look for words in bold print or italics. The instructor's lecture should provide additional clues as to what should be emphasized in the reading.
- Be selective in what you record.
  - Remember that the goal of notetaking is to produce a shortened version of the reading. This means that you must be selective in what is recorded in the notes. This is a skill that improves with practice.
- Use your own words.
  - Information should be paraphrased before it is recorded in the notes. The time spent trying to understand a passage and recording the main ideas in your own words is the single most important investment of time you can make. The chances of remembering are greater if the work is in your own words.
- Work quickly and efficiently.
  - Notetaking need not be, and should not be, painful and time consuming. Read, think, write, and move on. The rewards will come at test time.

- Use an appropriate form of organization.
  - Select a form of organization that will permit quick and active recall of the main points of the assignment. The form of organization should also allow one to see associations among ideas. The method chosen will depend on the nature of the material as well as personal preferences.
  - The Cornell and REAP methods of organization are strongly recommended.

### **Miscellaneous Tips**

- The most effective order of activities when taking notes is: listen, look, think, understand, paraphrase, then write.
- Notetaking style should be tailored to the type of presentation.
  - Lectures - listen and take notes as the instructor speaks
  - Seminars - listen to the discussion, write down main points after class
  - Labs - keep a notebook handy to record brief notes about procedures and results
- Listen for the following types of information during lecture; this is important material that should be recorded in notes.
  - Information not contained in the assigned readings
  - Explanations of obscure material within the texts and readings that students might not understand
  - Demonstrations or examples that provide greater understanding of the subject matter
  - Background information that puts the course material in context
- Strive to understand the big picture of the lecture. Don't waste time writing down details and copying tables or illustrations that can be found in the book and copied later. Instead, write brief notes about the subject being discussed.
- Avoid writing in full sentences.
- When in doubt about the importance of a piece of information, write it down. Check its significance later against the required readings or with the instructor.
- Write on your own notebook paper. There is not enough space to take notes on outlines or handouts provided by the instructor.
- Don't be stingy with notebook paper. Skip lines or leave empty spaces for adding information, clarifying information, or writing questions.

- Be cautious when loaning your notes to another student. Give him/her a xerox copy instead, and always get his/her name and phone number. Lost notes are irreplaceable.
- Make your own set of notes. While you certainly may supplement your notes with those of another student, don't rely on solely on notes taken by someone else. The notes may not be as complete or accurate as your own, you may not understand another person's shorthand or symbols, and another person may not record things he/she already knows but you don't.
- Always date your notes. Put the day, month and year at the top of every page. Dating notes helps one to find certain pieces of information and to organize notes.
- Always put page numbers on your notes. Like recording dates, using page numbers helps one to find information and to organize notes. Page numbering is particularly useful if notes are dropped and scrambled out of order.
- Put page numbers at the top of each page. You may want to start at "page 1" for each day, or you may choose to have a running page count for each unit (between exams) or for the entire semester or quarter.
- If you recopy or reorganize notes, be sure to renumber and redate the pages.
- Check the accuracy and completeness of notes by using any combination of the following sources of supporting information: textbook and other assigned readings, class mates, instructor, and tutors.

### **Listening Tips**

- Teachers send messages about the most important parts of their lectures by sending verbal, nonverbal, and body language cues.
- Important verbal cues are key words ("*important*") or phrases ("*primary causes of the war*"). Listen for these words and write down the ideas being conveyed. Also, listen for lists ("*the first characteristic*") and write down all items that are listed.
- Important nonverbal cues are conveyed by the emphasis that the teacher places on words and phrases by talking louder, by drawing out words, or by pausing. Whenever a teacher pauses, it is usually to allow students to write down ideas, so be sure to write these down.
- Important body language cues are conveyed by the teacher's face, body movements, and posture. The teacher may lean forward or use hand motions to signal important information. Look at any change in emotion conveyed by the teacher's facial expression (e.g., when the teacher says "This was a tragic event," she may change her facial expression to show sadness).

## Grading Notes

- Important because it means that every day is valuable
- Means that notes are a required part of classroom behavior – no more “Do I have to write this down”
- Require a notebook or a binder that students must bring everyday
- time saving grading strategy – two times per trimester or more, give students a checklist of all the work that must be in the notebook (it can also include things like journal entries, visual work, and homework), give them a couple days to make sure they have everything, and then check it. BUT instead of collecting every notebook from every student, students will grade each others’ notebooks using the checklist. Students should mark every page they look at with a check or a “10” in the upper right hand corner. Teachers can then collect notebooks and spot check the accuracy of the student grader. Teachers can also grade individual work like journal entries and homework.
- Ensure that students are taking effective notes by spot-checking throughout the year – walk around and mark students notes with checks or stickers – perhaps give extra credit to students who garner the most stickers or check marks when grading time comes around
- Make sure that the notebook grade is a significant part of the grade