

Guidelines for Improving Your Note Taking Skills

1. Date and identify each set of notes and keep the notes from different courses separate from one another.
2. Write legibly and on one side of the page only so that you won't have trouble deciphering your notes later on.
3. Whenever possible, try to take your notes in outline form, using your own system of enumeration and indentation to distinguish major or minor points.
4. Use your own words instead of trying to record your instructor's exact words. The one exception is definitions of technical terms, which should be recorded exactly as given.
5. Copy most diagrams, drawings and other illustrations that your instructor puts on the board.
6. Where appropriate, record your instructor's examples as they often clarify otherwise abstract ideas.
7. Make certain that you record correctly all names, dates, places, formulas, equations, rules, etc.
8. Keep alert for points that your instructor emphasizes by means of repetition, writing on chalkboard, extended comment, etc.
9. Keep alert for points that your instructor emphasizes by means of verbal clues. Watch for enumerations such as "the following five steps" or "the four major causes" and for summations such as "consequently" or "therefore."
10. Use underlining or symbols, such as an asterisk or star, to identify points that your instructor emphasizes.
11. Circle reading and other assignments that are mixed in with your lecture notes. Similarly, circle book titles and other references mentioned by your instructor.
12. Separate your thoughts from those of your instructor. Writing down your own ideas, examples and questions is an excellent way to keep alert during a lecture. For obvious reasons, however, you should bracket or otherwise label these as yours, not the instructor's.
13. Leave sufficient space to permit clarifying and expanding your notes later on. Ask a fellow student or your instructor to help you fill in the gaps if you think you missed one or more important points.
14. Don't be a clock-watcher. Instructors cannot always pace themselves accurately and may cram half the lecture into the last fifteen minutes. You should, therefore, pay as close attention to the end of his or her lecture as you did to the beginning.
15. Review and edit your notes as soon as possible after class. Use your page margins to fill in abbreviations, add omitted points, and correct errors.
16. Read your notes over carefully to make sure that you will be able to comprehend them without difficulty in the future. Take time to clarify material that is almost illegible or particularly confusing.
17. As you read your notes, underline or otherwise emphasize important points that you will want to give special attention to when you study the material later for an exam.