

**TOPIC**

# Note-taking

Helping students **PREPARE, ADVANCE** and **EXCEL.**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Being prepared for lectures. . . . . 1  
What is my listening style? . . . . . 2  
Active listening style. . . . . 2  
Active listening strategies. . . . . 3  
What do I take notes on? . . . . . 3  
Cornell Note-taking System . . . . . 4  
Mind mapping note-taking strategy . . . . . 5  
Note-taking short-cuts. . . . . 6  
Note-taking for reading. . . . . 6

**CAMPUSES**

**Flanagan**, Room 3620  
(above cafeteria)  
401-333-7440

**Knight**, Room 3540  
(third floor, library)  
401-825-1170

**Liston**, Room 2236  
(second floor, next to library)  
401-455-6116

**Newport**, Room 251 and 252  
(within library)  
401-851-1701

## Note taking for lectures

Listening to a lecture and taking notes is a form of communication. Usually, lectures are a form of one-way communication where the teacher does most of the verbal communication, and the student only listens.

It is important for students to realize that they can make the lecture format a two-way communication by actively listening and asking questions when necessary. Most instructors would welcome more student participation in class. Oftentimes students are afraid to speak up in class, and they miss an opportunity to clarify points of the lecture or their reading assignments.



## Being prepared for lectures

Good note-taking does not mean writing down every word that the instructor says. Note-taking is not a passive act of simply writing down words but a way to arrange thoughts and materials to help you remember information. Effective note-taking strategies include:

- being prepared – bringing a notebook or laptop to record notes
- receiving permission to record lectures if desired
- attending all lectures
- being an active listener
- highlighting main ideas
- organizing key points
- comparing and contrasting relationships
- looking for patterns
- reviewing your notes on a weekly basis

## What is my listening style?

Just as your instructor has a particular speaking style, you also have a listening style. Your listening style affects the quality of your note-taking skills. Please complete the short assessment below to determine your listening style.

- 1a.** When I am listening in class, I lean back and get as comfortable as possible.
- 1b.** When I am listening in class, I sit up straight and even lean forward a little.
- 2a.** I let the instructor's words wash over me, generally going with the flow of the lecture.
- 2b.** I try to guess in advance what the instructor is going to say and what direction the lecture is taking.
- 3a.** I regard each lecture as a separate event, not necessarily related to what the instructor has said before or will say the next time.
- 3b.** As I listen, I regularly ask myself how this relates to what was said in previous classes.
- 4a.** When I take notes, I try to reproduce the instructor's words as closely as possible.
- 4b.** When I take notes, I try to interpret and summarize the ideas behind the instructor's words.
- 5a.** I don't usually question the importance of what the instructor is saying or why it's the topic of a lecture or a discussion.
- 5b.** I ask why the content of the lecture is important enough for the instructor to be speaking about it.
- 6a.** I rarely question the accuracy or logic of a presentation, assuming that the instructor knows the topic better than I do.
- 6b.** I often ask myself how the instructor knows something and find myself wondering how it could be proved.
- 7a.** I rarely make eye contact with the instructor.
- 7b.** I often make eye contact with the instructor.

If you tended to prefer the "a" statements in most of the pairs, you have a more *passive listening style*. If you tended to prefer the "b" statements, you have a more *active listening style*.



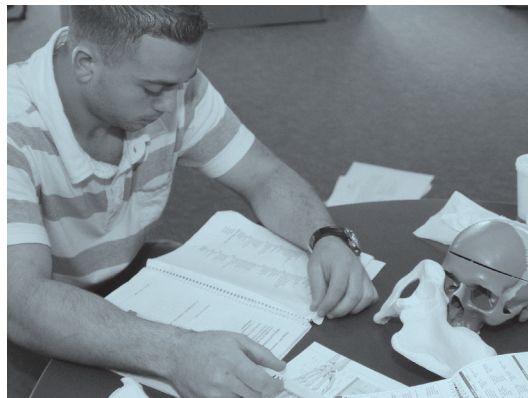
### ACTIVE LISTENING STYLE

Good note-takers are active listeners. Active listeners are fully attentive and try to understand the intent of the speaker. An unmotivated listener is one who does not have a vivid reason for listening to a speaker. Active listening is a consuming activity that requires physical and mental attention, energy, concentration and discipline. Listening is a skill that must be developed to be successful both academically and professionally.

## Active listening strategies

If you apply the following suggestions, you will find yourself listening and taking notes more effectively, both in class and outside of class. Following these strategies will make you an active listener.

- **Be open and willing to learn.** The best listening strategies in the world would not help if you are not willing to listen. The responsibility for interest and understanding lies with you, not with the speaker. Learning is up to the learner, so you must determine why what the speaker is saying is important to you. If you simply want to sit passively and blame the speaker for your lack of success, then you're not a serious learner.
- **Reduce distractions.** If you can't hear or see the speaker – move! Move away from sources of noise (*human or otherwise*) so you can be a better listener and learner. Turn off cell phones, Black-Berrys, iPods, Wi-Fi, etc.



- **Listen to what the speaker is saying.**

Don't tune out the speaker because you don't like something about him/her or the message being delivered. Be sure you understand something before you reject it.

- **Concentrate: Don't let your mind wander.**

Active listening requires energy. Sit up, keep your spine straight and uncross your legs. Maintain eye contact and lean slightly forward. Participate in discussions and ask questions. Excuse yourself from classes if you find it difficult to maintain a wakeful state. Get a drink, stretch your legs or visit the lavatory to splash water on your face to revitalize your concentration.

- **Observe.** Watch for obvious verbal and nonverbal clues about what information is important. If your instructor uses repetition, becomes animated, writes information on the board, it is probably important.
- **Look at the main idea or ideas of the presentations.** Facts are important only as they support the speaker's points. If you have trouble distinguishing between the important and trivial, visit the Student Success Center to sign up for a workshop or request a tutor.
- **Be quiet.** The fundamental rule of listening is to be quiet while the speaker is talking. Don't interrupt or talk to classmates: be attentive. The speaker's role is to make the message clear. As a listener, your role is to listen, so you can understand the message being delivered.

## What do I take notes on?

*It is your job to determine what is important.*

Prepare for the lecture by reviewing the course outline and previous notes and by reading the assigned chapter or articles prior to class. When taking notes in class, you will likely find it difficult to write down every detail. You don't need to take down all the information in lectures or from a text, especially when they overlap.

Focus on information that reflects the main themes of the course:

- Key words from overheads or chalkboards.
- Information that is repeated or is confusing.
- Details that build on course readings and previous lectures.

### TIP:

Think of note-taking as sorting and organizing information while you listen or read.

## Cornell Note-taking System

The Cornell method is effective for integrating text and lecture notes. One of the keys to the system is that Cornell notes make use of your existing strength as a note-taker so that learning the system requires a minimum of preparation and adjustment.

Additionally, it permits you to develop study notes very soon after taking original lecture or textbook notes without the added work of rewriting vast amounts of material.

### How you do it

- Draw a line down the left side of your page, about two and a half inches from the left-hand margin.
- Keep the notes you write in class to the right of the line.
- Indent major supporting details beneath each main idea, trying to use no more than one line for each item, and leave space between topics to add information.
- Fill in the left column with key concepts, questions and ideas when reviewing your notes.

**On this side  
of the page** ↓  
(recall column)

**Reduce** ideas and facts to concise jotting and summaries as cues for **reciting, reviewing and reflecting.**

**On this side  
of the page** ↓  
(recording column)

**Record** the lecture as fully and as meaningfully as possible.

This format provides the perfect opportunity for following through with the *five Rs of note taking*. They are:

#### 1. Record.

During the lecture, record as many meaningful facts and ideas as you can in the main column. Write legibly.

#### 2. Reduce.

As soon after as possible, summarize these ideas and facts concisely in the recall column. Summarizing clarifies meanings and relationships, reinforces continuity, and strengthens memory. Also, it is a way of preparing for the examinations gradually as well as ahead of time.

#### 3. Recite.

Now cover the column. Using only your jottings in the recall column as cues or “flags” to help you recall, repeat or say facts and ideas of the lecture as fully as you can, not mechanically, but in your own words with as much appreciation of the meaning as you can. Then, uncovering your notes, verify what you have said. This procedure helps to transfer the facts and ideas to your long-term memory.

#### 4. Reflect.

Reflective students distill their opinions for their notes. They make such opinions the starting point of their own musings upon the subjects they are studying. Such musings aid them in making sense out of their courses and academic experiences by finding relationships among them. Reflective students continually label and index their experiences and ideas, and put them into structures, outlines, summaries, and frames of reference. They rearrange and file them. Best of all, they have an eye for the vital information.

#### 5. Review.

If you spend 10 minutes every week or so in a quick review of your notes, you will retain most of what you have learned and you will be able to use your knowledge to greater effectiveness.

### TIP:

*If you have never used a formal note-taking process, you may want to practice the system by taking notes while watching and listening to a news program. This will allow you an opportunity to practice in a stress-free environment.*

## Mind-mapping note-taking strategy

### What is mind-mapping?

A mind map is a visual form of note-taking. The advantage is that you can see connections in the big picture. You also can see connections to the main idea.

### How to do it

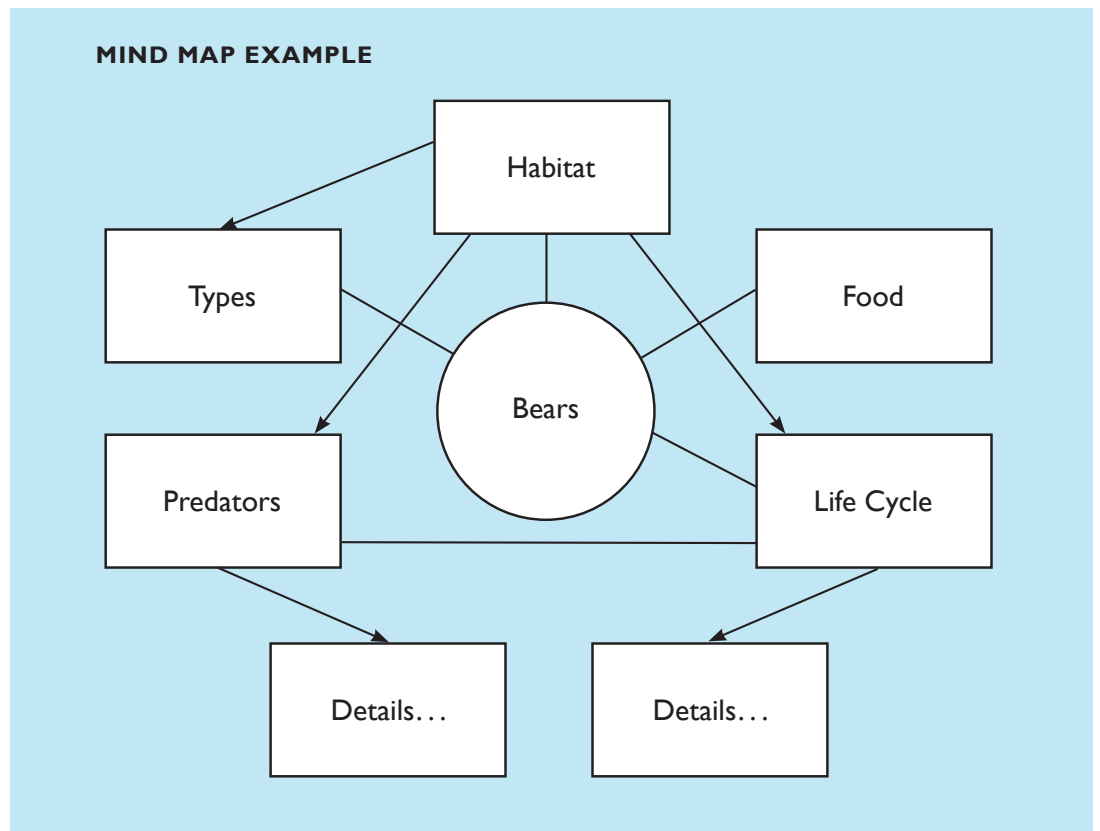
Identify a main topic or concept and write it in the middle of a page. As you discover related ideas, add them to the page and connect them with lines to the main concept. If they relate to one another, indicate the relationships with additional lines.

Finally, record important details about each idea and connect these together with the rest of your idea map.



### TIP:

You may want to consider using unlined notebooks – especially if you are using mind-mapping note-taking strategies or for a math or science class. Unlined paper makes drawings and diagrams easier to use.





## Note-taking shortcuts

It is helpful to develop and employ abbreviations when taking notes. Come up with short forms of frequently used long words (e.g., *b/c for because*) and use these short forms when recording information. Phrases, abbreviations and symbols should probably be used in place of full sentences in most situations. Obvious exceptions would be when there's a definition or information presented that you don't understand. Symbols (such as "\*", "!" or "?") are useful for signifying importance, or can be used to point out areas which require further explanation. Such shortcuts can help you write less and listen more as you try to capture the essence of the lecture.

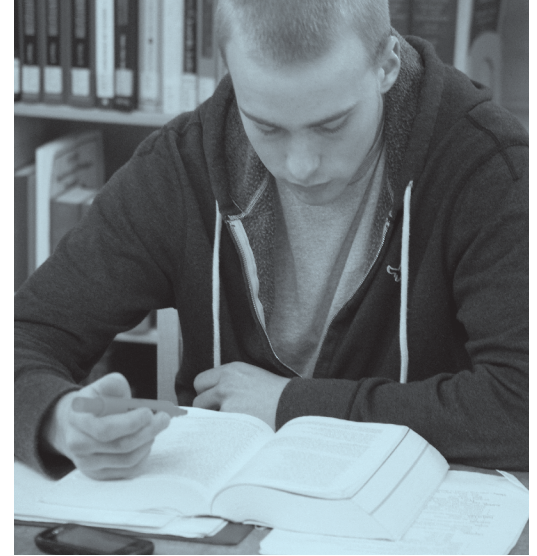
### TIP:

To improve your listening skills, ask your instructor if you may tape the lectures. Taping the lectures may relieve anxiety over "missing" key information.

### TIP:

When taking notes from a textbook you should be highlighting or underlining no more than 25 percent of the page!

SYMBOL	MEANING
>	Greater than; increase
<	Less than; decrease
?	Question
w/	With
w/o	Without
√ or *	Important Idea
+	Positive
-	Negative
x	Times
&	And
#	Number
i.e.	That is
Ex.	For Example
Lb.	Pound
Assoc	Association with
Info	Information
~	lost
P	Leads to (e.g., <i>motivation P success</i> )



## Note-taking for reading

There is a separate handout and workshop for textbook reading strategies that offer a comprehensive overview of successful techniques to improve your reading strategies.

This segment strictly deals with note-taking while reading. Many of the same tips and techniques outlined earlier in this handout regarding note-taking for lectures also apply to note-taking while reading.

- **Less is more!** Restrict your impulse to highlight or underline passages in your textbook. Students should not be taking notes on more than 25 percent of a page. Highlight only key passages, concepts and terms.
- **Vary the color** of the highlighter or ink to visibly separate information on the page.
- **Create flashcards** using index cards to review key concepts for your text.
- **Create an outline** of the material you learned after reading a chapter or section of your text to assist you in your studies.
- **Jot notes in the margin** of the text or your class notebook indicating passages that you want the instructor to review or explain.
- **Talk with your instructor** if you do not understand your textbook assignment.