

Notes on Note-taking

Fundamentally, note taking is about rephrasing and summarizing something. This helps with both understanding and remembering. When taking notes, *record what is important to you*. If you already know a topic, your notes will be brief. However, if you have a lot of new stuff you should have many notes.

Not only does the content of notes depend on how well you know the subject, it will also vary with the purpose of the notes. For example, if a person who teaches chemistry was attending a high school chemistry class someone else was teaching, what they include would depend on who the notes were for.

- If attending the class for themselves, their notes would mostly be about how the teacher taught the subject. (eg: "Used elastic bands to discuss differences in bond strength")
- If asked to evaluate the teacher's teaching style, they should mostly take notes on what they were doing well and what they could improve. (eg: "using high quality microphone good, but if too far left or right voice fades. Teacher needs to learn where the mic can hear voice.")
- If attending the class as a note-taker for a student unable to attend, they would take notes on what was being taught. (eg: double bonds stronger than single bonds)

Same class, very different things were important enough to record based on why they were there.

Note taking is very personal, and you will develop a personal style. Additionally, the same method of taking notes won't always work for different subjects. Practice and find out what works for you!

So, what are some things you should consider for good quality notes from textbook readings or lectures? (Not listed in any particular order.)

- Include some sort of header, usually the course (or meeting name) and date. It helps to know why the notes are important. For notes on something other than a class, include the name of the textbook, book, website address, etc.
- Learn abbreviations for common words or develop your own.
 - Some of my favourites are w/ for "with," w/o for "without," ∴ for "therefore," << for "much less than," and ???? for marking a spot that I was confused (about what I was supposed to learn, didn't hear properly), and ?sp? for when I don't know the spelling of something that I will need to know correctly on an exam.
- Learn what you can go back and fill in later.
 - I leave blanks to fill in after class when the lecture is moving very quickly. I write out a thing in full once, and after that Lavoisier is being abbrev. as "La", territory is "terr", etc.
- Especially when taking notes during a lecture, review the notes as soon as possible!
 - Did you miss something important? Did you use abbreviations without defining them? Were there two things abbreviated as "La."?
- Remember – spelling *generally* doesn't matter if the meaning is clear! Spelling "spelling" as "spelng" won't make meaning unclear, but spelling the name "Sara Black" as "Sarah Blake" would be a problem.
- When taking notes on a textbook, include page references. This way, if you don't understand it later, you can easily go back and re-read it.
- For notes taken by hand, especially in the sciences, it can be useful to use ¼ inch graph paper. This helps to keep the indents consistent and when creating a table or graph.
- For notes taken by hand if you need to indicate *italics* you can write using *handwriting*, rather than *printing*. Alternately, underline or highlight instead of italics or use different colour pens.

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Note-taking styles

In the examples below I am pretending that an American high school student is taking notes from their textbook about Canada. (I am not using a real textbook, so the page numbers are made up.)

There are a lot of different ways you can take notes. These are only examples to get you started! You want to use a method that won't interrupt your flow.

Method: Outlining or listing with or without comments

By summarizing the key topics of the text or lecture it is easier to both see what the notes are about and find notes later. Indenting the sub-topics helps to show how the information is related. This is the most practical way of note-taking for using during a class lecture.

The example below is a version with the comments are to the left of the line – the comments are the note-takers thoughts. This is a place to record things that they need to do later, and/or comment on how things are interrelated. It is very useful if you want to make a lot of comments, but still know exactly what information you got from a book/lecture and what was *not* from that source.

World Geography – mm/dd/yy

Canada, Chapter 2 (pg 42) Canadian Geography

bigger than US!!!

Hans Island/Whiskey "war" is hilarious. Topic for Canada class essay?
Need to learn "territorial waters" definition

???territory??? Ask teacher

ask: are cities other than capitals on test?

- 2.1 (pg 44) Canadian (CAN) Geography
 - Pop: ~35mill (2016), capital: Ottawa, north of USA (except AK), size: ~3.85 million sq. miles
 - Land borders: USA, Denmark (Hans Island). Sea borders: USA, Denmark/Greenland, France (St. Pierre & Miquelon Islands)

- 2.2 (pg 46) CAN Provinces
 - definitions: province (large CAN geographic area, similar to US states), territory
 - total 10 provinces and 3 territories
 - Alberta (AB) (pg 48), province
 - Pop ~4 mill (2016), capital: Edmonton, western (north of MT), size: ~2.6 million sq. miles
 - British Columbia (BC)...

Method: Concept Mapping

A concept map is a drawing of how topics relate to one another. An example of a map can be found on a couple of the pages listed in the "viewpoints on Note-taking" list in this handout.

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Method: Q&A

Q&A-style notes include a question and answer arranged in a table. This allows you to easily scan the list of questions when reviewing to find the answers you need. A closely related form of study notes would be flash cards. The question would be on one side of the card, and the answer on the back.

Capital of Canada?	Ottawa (pg 44)
Population of Canada?	~ 35 million (2016). (pg 44)
How big is Canada?	size: ~3.85 million sq. miles (pg 44)
Where is Canada	North of US, except AK (pg 45)
Countries that Canada has a land border with?	USA, Denmark (Hans Island). (pg 45)
Countries that Canada has a sea border with?	USA, Denmark/Greenland, France (St. Pierre & Miquelon Islands) (pg 45)
What is a Canadian <u>province</u> ?	large CAN geographic area, similar to US states (pg 46)
What is a Canadian <u>Territory</u> ?	(pg 46)
How many provinces and territories does Canada have?	10 provinces and 3 territories (pg 46 & 47)
What is Alberta?	Canadian province (pg 46, pg 48-50)
Population of Alberta?	~4 mill (2016)
Capital of Alberta?	Edmonton
Location of Alberta?	Western CAN (north of MT),
Size of Alberta?	~2.6 million sq. miles

More viewpoints on Note-Taking

<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/note-taking/>

Especially good description of methods of note-taking beyond mapping and summarizing.

<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/take-notes.html>

Short, aimed at high-school and middle-school students.

<https://www.student.unsw.edu.au/notetaking-tips>

Excellent overview and list of great abbreviations and symbols for common words.

<https://career-advice.jobs.ac.uk/career-development/top-ten-tips-on-note-taking/>

<https://post.edu/blog/preventing-information-overload-note-taking-tips-students/>