

TAKING NOTES

Just as education is a process not a destination, so are your notes. Notes are NEVER a finished product; you should be continually editing your notes. The process is not difficult but is not always easy to figure out on your own. In truth, when I was in school no one ever taught me how to take notes. Sure, I learned about creating an outline using Roman Numerals and the Latin Alphabet, but no one told me how to sort through what I am reading to decipher what is important and what is extra. But no one can make a steadfast rule that will hold true for every instance of note taking. Instead, I will give you some guidelines for the process that will help in the process. The rest you will have to figure out yourself through trial and error.

1) Plan ahead.

- look at your schedule, perhaps you play a sport, or are in a club, or are planning to attend an event, if you know ahead of time there are days that you will not be able to dedicate to studying, try to get ahead instead of getting behind - it is ALWAYS more difficult to catch up*

2) Find a quiet place free from distractions to do your homework, reading, and studying.

- try to work out a set time each day that you and your parent(s) know you will be studying and doing homework*
- ask your parents if they can cut down on the interruptions during that time*
- do remember, this time will have to be a compromise between yourself and your parents and their demands on your time, and it may not be exactly the same everyday as things “pop-up”*

3) Skim the chapter/section that will be read. Get an idea what it is about before you actually read it through so you have an idea of what to expect.

- look at pictures, analyze graphs and data presented*
- read the headings and subheadings*

4) Find any vocabulary and make sure you know the definitions.

- most textbooks have pulled out the important vocabulary for the section/chapter and listed the terms either at the beginning of each section or at the end of the chapter*
- if there are any words of which you are unsure, define them*

5) Read each section of part of a section. Don't try to do it all at once. Just as you don't swallow your entire meal in one gulp, don't swallow the entire section in one gulp either. DO NOT NOTE YET!

- some textbooks give the main ideas of the section or part of the section, while reading, look especially for that information*
- for textbooks that have subheadings in each section, read one section at a time*
- for textbooks that do not use subheadings, read the section through*

6) Go back and go over what you just read and this time pick out the important ideas and write them down.

- skip lines or fold your paper into 1/3 - 2/3*
- write the important ideas on the 1/3 side*
- additional information and details can be written on the 2/3 side AS NEEDED - do not feel obligated to add details especially if you feel you do not need it*
- leave extra space in case you later feel the need to add information*

- *write down questions in a DIFFERENT COLOR than your notes so that you can be sure to ask the teacher in class*
- 7) *In class, use your notes while the teacher is giving notes.*
- *add information in the appropriate place in YOUR notes when the teacher goes over something you did not add when you took notes*
 - *if there is additional information in your notes that the teacher did not go over in class and are unsure of just how important it is, ask the teacher in class about it*

Remember, as a teacher with limited in-class time, we do not have enough time to go over every bit of detail, at times we have to assume that the easier concepts you already understand, without your questions, we won't know. Do not be afraid to ask questions. Do not worry that other students might think they are so-called "bad questions." The truth is, everything a teacher goes over in class, even if other students know it, still benefits them because they get to hear it again.

- 8) *Study each night. Cramming is only a good strategy when you do not need to remember the information for more than a very short while.*
- *the more often you study an idea or concept, the more times you hear it and the more likely you are to remember it*

Primacy v. Recency

- **Primacy:** primary or first. Typically we tend to forget things we learned longer ago. It goes along with the expression "use it or lose it." If we study some every night it is not only something we learned a little while ago, but it is also something recent.
- **Recency:** or the most recent. Typically we can recall things from short-term memory quicker and more easily than long-term memory. However, we are more likely to forget this information in the long run unless we somehow find a way to commit it to long-term memory. Studying each night helps to reinforce the things in our long-term memory.

Moral of the story... Study some each night!

- 9) *Answer review questions. If you have been studying some each night, then this will be easy and will build your confidence.*
- *convert each heading and subheading in the section/chapter into a question*
 - *without notes, answer each question*
 - *evaluate your confidence in your answers, that is, ask yourself, "how well did I know that answer?" If you are confident, it is an idea that you know pretty well, if not, then make sure to review it some more.*
 - *if the textbook gives main ideas within each section, convert each into a question and do the same as above*