

Note-Taking in Two Columns

Purpose

For some students, note-taking is as simple and mindless as breathing. Most students, however, typically have slap-dash methods of recording important information—methods that make it difficult to study later when they need to retrieve that information. For this reason, you may wish to teach the students the two-column note-taking method, stressing that this method can be adapted for use in any learning situation or class.

Directions

The directions for this seven-point method, to be shared with the students, are as follows:

- **Write on only one side of the page in a notebook or journal.** The students should begin by dividing the page into two parts (the left-hand side should be one-third of the paper and the right-hand side two-thirds) either by folding it or by drawing a vertical line. Each page should be dated as it is used, then numbered sequentially, following the page before.
- **Write notes in on the right-hand column of the paper while listening to the teacher.** Explain to the students that notes should be written in their own words. They should not attempt to write down everything that is said but should write down all of the main points the teacher makes. They should include anything that the teacher writes on the board. If the teacher provides topic headings, they should write those in the left-hand column.
- **Notes should continue onto the next page.** Explain to the students that they should not try to crowd all of the information onto one page. Encourage them to let their notes breathe, even if that means continuing onto the next page and the next. Remind the students that the more complete their notes, the more productive their study time will be.
- **Listen carefully for verbal signals.** Point out that the teacher will often give signals about the information being taught, for example, saying, “There are four concepts to remember with this topic.” This signals that student notes should include four pieces of information about that topic. The students should be urged to include those hints in their notes. Later, when they review their notes, they will see whether they captured all the points, or whether they left something out. Urge the students to pay attention to verbal signals.
- **Emphasize key points with arrows or other symbols.** Sometimes the students will be able to do this as the teacher speaks. Other times they will want to highlight certain points when they review their notes while studying. Explain to the students that when examples are given in class, they might highlight these examples with the letters “EX” written large and boxed in the margin next to the example.
- **Review notes the same day.** The students will find it helpful to clarify anything they find confusing or write a question in the margins to ask the next day. (They will find it helpful to put boxes around questions, assignments, and other items they will have to refer to again.)
- Last, in the left-hand column, suggest that students write topic headings for their notes. They will be able to review by covering up the right side of the paper and testing themselves on what they know based on these headings.



Review

To review, the following are the seven major points of this method of note-taking:

1. Write on only one side of a page in a notebook or journal.
2. Write notes in the right-hand column.
3. Notes should continue onto the next page.
4. Listen carefully for verbal signals.
5. Emphasize key points with arrows or other symbols.
6. Review notes the same day.
7. Write topic headings on the left side of the paper as a review help.

(You might want to ask, at the end of your instruction on this method of note-taking, if the students can recall these points in correct order.)

