Note-Taking: A Complete Strategic Checklist

By being intentional before, during, and after each class session, you can turn your notes into a powerful study tool instead of just a collection of words.

This checklist will guide you through what to do at each stage: how to prepare before class, stay focused during class, and review and organize your notes after class so you can improve both your note-taking skills and your ability to retain and apply what you learn.

	COMPLETED? (YES or NO)	TASK LIST
PRE-LECTURE		**Read Assignments and Review the Textbook:** Reviewing assigned readings before class helps you recognize key concepts, understand the context of the lecture, and take more focused, meaningful notes during class.
		Identify Unfamiliar and/or Difficult Content: Identifying unfamiliar or difficult content before class allows you to listen more actively, ask better questions, and focus your note-taking on areas where you need the most clarity.
		Class Preparedness: Go to class prepared with all of the needed supplies and tools. (notebook/laptop/tablet)
		Seating in the Classroom: Choosing a seat near the front or away from distractions can help you stay focused, hear clearly, and take more accurate, organized notes during class.
		Organization of Course Material: Organizing your course materials like readings, handouts, and notes can allow you to quickly access what you need and follow along more effectively during the lecture.
DURING LECTURE		**Date and Format Your Notes:** Find a style of note-taking that works best for you and the course. This might look like using one style or a combination of styles so that your notes are the best resource they can be.
		Write the Most Important Information: Don't try to write every word your professor says. Leave grammar and spelling to the side. Write down the most important information like key concepts or main ideas, important terms, and examples discussed in class.
		Abbreviate and Use Your Own Words: To take effective notes, develop the habit of using common abbreviations and symbols (like "w/" for with or "→" for leads to) and practice paraphrasing concepts in your own words.
		Content Relationship: Indent examples and details under main ideas to show their relationship.
		Questions: Write down the questions asked during the lecture and leave space in the margins to resolve confusing ideas
		Take Advantage of Class Time: Pay attention and take notes until class is officially dismissed.
POST LECTURE		**Review Within 24 Hours:** To minimize forgetting and maximize information retention, review your notes within 24 hours after class.
		Underline and Highlight: To show important words or phrases
		Fill In Gaps: Fill in any gaps by adding missed details, clarifying confusing points, and organizing the information while it's still fresh in your memory. Also you can check grammar and spelling.
		Test Yourself: Use your notes to create a practice exam.
		Summarize the Information: At the end of your notes for each class, write a short summary of what you learned in class. This will help you focus back on the main ideas of the lecture and serve as a quick review before your next class to help refresh the content that was covered.

Note-Taking: Tips and Methods

Good note-taking is more than just writing things down, it's an active process that helps you understand, remember, and apply what you're learning. Whether you prefer digital or handwritten notes, developing strong habits before, during, and after class can boost your comprehension and academic performance. The following tips will help you stay organized, engaged, and ready to make the most of every lecture.

BEFORE CLASS

- Preview the Material: Identify key concepts or unfamiliar terms.
- Get Organized: Gather your materials and set up your notes in a consistent format
- Choose Your Spot: Sit where you can see and hear clearly, minimizing distractions.

DURING CLASS

- Focus on Main Ideas: Key concepts, definitions, and examples—not every word.
- Use Abbreviations & Paraphrasing: Save time by shortening common words or phrases.
- Stay Engaged: Listen actively, ask questions, and mark confusing points to revisit later.

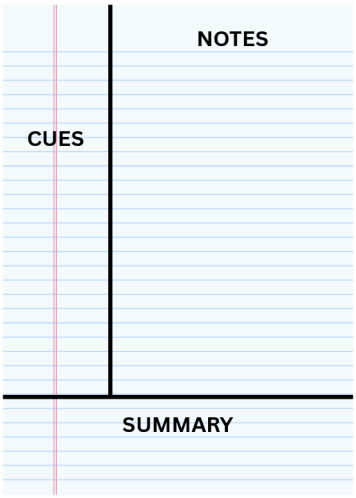
AFTER CLASS

- Fill in Gaps: Review your notes to add missing information or clarify.
- Summarize & Reflect: Write a brief summary to reinforce understanding
- Organize & Store: Keep your notes in a dedicated, easy-to-access system for future study sessions.

Cornell Method

For:
- Main Ideas
- Questions that connect points
- Diagrams
- Prompts to help you study

When:
- Before class
- During class
- After class



For:
- Recording lecture

When:
- During class

For:
- Top-level main ideas
- Quick reference

When:
- After class
- Before next class (review)

Outlining Method

I. Main Point
- A. Sub Point 1
- B. Sub Point 2
  - a. Detailed Point
  - b. Detailed Point
- C. Sub Point 3

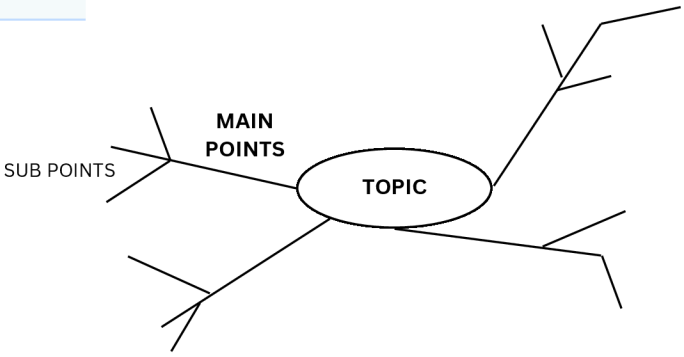
II. Next Main Point
- A. Sub Point 1

Information is structured from a

BIG MAIN IDEA

down to

SMALL SPECIFIC DETAILS

Mind Mapping Method

- Visual learners
- Creative thinkers
- Students studying complex or big-picture topics where relationships between concepts are important (e.g., psychology, biology, communication).
- People who struggle with traditional outlines and want a more flexible, engaging way to capture and review information.