

Note-taking 101: The Three Types of Note-taking Everyone Needs to Know

How Should You Take Notes?

While there are many different ways you can take notes, along with different situations requiring various note-taking methods, the two things to keep in mind are (1) purpose (2) functionality. It's important that your notes fulfill the purpose they have for you; whether you're studying for a test or developing ideas and points for pitching a business, your notes should be an asset and reliable resource you can depend on. They should be easy to read and should flow well when you are revisiting them.

We're going to review three different types of note-taking that provide support for various types of learners and preferences from structured to unstructured.

Cornell Note-Taking Method

To start with the most structured note-taking method, the Cornell note-taking method is one in which most students know of and have used before. This notetaking method is great for studying exams, especially because it allows you to actively reflect on your notes and summarize in your own words. The way you would structure your notes for this method is to divide your paper into three sections. Going down vertically on the page, draw a line that divides the page to a 1:3 ratio, with more space on the right side. Do not draw the line all the way down, but draw a horizontal line across about 5-6 lines above the bottom of the page. This divides the page into your three sections: (1) topics/terms, (2) details, (3) summary.

You will write any main topics, questions, and keywords on the left side of the page and then the key details that you want to include and that you want to remember on the right side of the page. Then, once you are finished with the lecture or the reading you are taking notes on, you can write your "summary" of the notes, about 1-2 sentences, at the bottom of the page where you left 5-6 lines. This is a great after lecture activity, as it allows you to assess how much information you retained from the lecture or reading that you were taking notes on.

Mind Mapping

For more visual learners, and for more remote memorization, mind mapping is a very effective note-taking method. Mind mapping allows you to physically see the relationships and connections between topics and the individual pieces of information. Mind maps create a visual that can translate to mental triggers that allow you to memorize the content easily. Mind mapping is one of the easier ways to get creative with your notes because it emulates doodling and drawing than actual work. When you go back to study your notes, you can easily add details as well!

Box Note-Taking Method

The last notetaking method we will discuss is the box note-taking method. This method allows you to compartmentalize your ideas into boxes, which separates the one topic from another. This study method is especially useful for reviewing lectures that go topic by topic. The boxes allow you to visually sanction off the topics and the details. So, when you go back to study your notes for a future test, you can test yourself box-by-box. This note-taking system is best used as a studying method rather than when you are actively taking notes in class. If you prefer digital note-taking, this method is also useful since you can move the boxes around as you see fit.