Tips for Improving Notes

Are notes helpful?

Have you ever taken notes for class... and then never referred back to them?

The effort of taking notes is NOT a waste of time, even if you never read back over them. The physical act of writing notes has been shown to strengthen memories, aid in retention, and increase recall. This means that you will do better on tests.

You learn more through taking notes than just listening. After 24 hours, students can forget up to 80% of what they heard. For best results, you should review your notes within 24 hours after class or lecture.

Does format matter?

Yes! Consider what you are taking notes on before selecting a format for taking notes.

Most students take notes the same way in every class, in a *linear* (think "outline") format.

Example:

1. Your notes
   1. May look
      1. Something like
         1. This

A linear or outline format may be helpful when taking notes on a process or sequence of events. However, for many subjects you may want to give *non-linear* (think "out of order") notes a try! Do not be afraid to use different colors and shapes. Visual memories are **strong**, so the more visual you make your notes - the better!

Example:
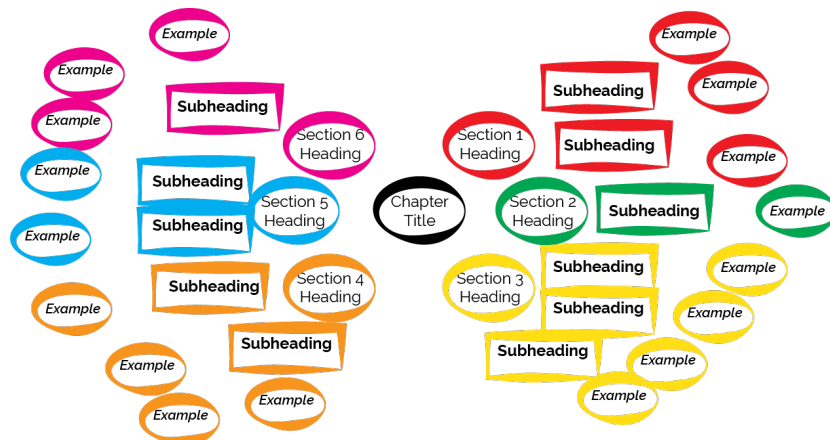
Highlighting and note-taking

Have you ever opened a used textbook to find that the previous owner highlighted almost every word? Perhaps you are guilty of this, too. It is important when highlighting or take notes not to get caught up in all of the details.

Approach highlighting and note-taking from a textbook, study guide, or PowerPoint presentation with these steps:
1. Read the entire paragraph.
2. Decide what is important.
3. Highlight (or write down) words or short phrases - not full sentences!

You should abide by the 80/20 rule of note-taking.
- 80% of your time should be spent **reading**.
- 20% of your time should be spent **taking notes**.

If you are spending more than 12 minutes each hour taking notes - reevaluate what is important and focus more on the reading!