

Take Note!

Note-taking forms the core of your study techniques and getting it right can make studying a lot easier in college. There are many techniques to take notes, and finding one that works for you is as easy as experimenting with a few methods and seeing the result. We've included three specific ones here for you to try.

Suggestion: Getting a loose-leaf notebook, so that you can add, delete or rearrange pages helps with any note-taking method.

Also, it's helpful to note the date, course, and names of any guest speakers that presented that day – including other students.

5 R and Cornell Method

This is a popular and very effective form of note taking, developed by Walter Pauk, a Cornell Professor. It saves time by not requiring lengthy re-writes of notes. All the work is done in the initial lecture or reading session and during a short review.

For our purposes, we are blending the Cornell method with the 5 R method: **Record, Reduce, Recite, Reflect, Review.**

Some bookstores sell a Cornell Notebook that is already ruled for this use. Otherwise, you can easily do it yourself.

1. Separate your page by drawing a vertical line approximately 2 1/2 inches from the left-hand side. This will leave a 6 inch section on the right.
2. At the bottom, section off 1 inch for a page summary.

Step 1: Record

When taking notes in class, write in the bigger section on the right-hand side. Leave plenty of space between each point your instructor makes, because you'll be filling in later.

As soon as possible after class or, at the very latest, before your next lecture, fill in any incomplete sentences and rephrase disjointed thoughts in the space you left on the right-hand side.

Step 2: Reduce

For every significant bit of information, write a cue in the left-hand column. This is where you will devise questions that the notes answer (think "Jeopardy"). You can also write key words and phrases.

The 1 inch section at the bottom is used for a summary. Think of one or two sentences that review the material on the page. The summary section serves two important functions:

1. Acts as a quick reference when looking for specific information later.
2. Forces you to view the material in a relational sense – the bigger picture.
The summary should help you see how specific facts fit into broader theories.

Anytime you want to review your notes, cover the right side with a thick piece of paper, and use the notes in the left-hand column to think through concepts.

Step 3: Recite

With the right-hand side covered, use your cues to talk through, and reiterate main points out loud. Say the cue on the left out loud, and then say as much of the information on the right hand side as you can recall.

When you have said as much as you can remember, remove the card and see if you covered all the points. Saying things out loud enhances your learning process and helps commit information to long-term memory.

Does the idea of speaking out loud make you uncomfortable? Bear in mind that it is one of the most effective study methods available, whether you are alone, teaching a friend, or rephrasing material into your own words with a study partner. It's also the fastest way to learn, leaving you time for more important things!

Step 4: Reflect

Think it over. How do your notes relate to what you knew before?

What connections can you make to previous material?

How can you make this new information meaningful?

What material could you use for essays? Make a note and create a list of topics you can develop.

Step 5: Review

Review your notes at your next study session, before your next lecture, before reading new material, and when studying for tests.