

Suggestions for Note taking

1. *Organize* both your class and your reading notes. At the very least, use separate notebooks (or sections of a looseleaf binder) for different courses.
2. *Label and date* your notes. The date will tell you at what point in a course you covered specific material. The label will help you quickly locate topics you may wish to review.
3. *Edit and revise* your notes. Go through your notes, periodically (especially your class notes) to make handwriting legible, to fill in missing words, to add details, and to make connections with further points you have learned from the time you first took the notes. (you may wish to add the later notes in a different color ink.)
4. *Separate* your comments and observations from the ideas of your instructor and from the authors of the texts you read. If you wish to use your notes in a paper or other written assignment, you will have an easy time identifying your own ideas—as long as you separate or otherwise distinguish them. P. 89-90

Improving Study Skills

1. Finding an appropriate place to study
2. Mapping out a schedule of study time
3. Setting goals for study sessions
4. Learning to focus and concentrate
5. Increasing your understanding of what you study
6. Remembering what you study

Finding a Suitable Study Environment

You should study in a place free of distractions—no radio blaring, television, no friends stopping by to chat, etc. And it should also be well enough lit for you to read comfortably.

Mapping Out a Schedule of Study Time

As important as an appropriate place to study is adequate time. Ideally, you should try to study at times when you are most alert and work your best. Some people work best early in the day, others work better late at night. Whatever your optimum study time is, try to ensure that you schedule your study hours for that time. Most important is that you study your most difficult and demanding subjects during your optimum study times. You should also study those subjects first, while your mind is at its best. When circumstances prevent you from studying during your optimum time, you need to have other regularly scheduled study.

Setting Goals for Studying

Whether you are settling in for a long study session for a major exam or just squeezing in a short period to review for a quiz, you should have a specific goal for your study session. Before you get down to work, you need to have an idea of what you want to accomplish and how long you plan on studying to reach your goal. Three short 1-hour sessions are preferable to one marathon 3-hour session. The shorter sessions give you a chance to review and reinforce what you learn.

Taking Breaks

To make efficient use of your time, it is necessary to take breaks from concentrated periods of study. There are limits to how long we can concentrate, just as there are limits to how many things we can hold at once in our short-term memory. In a 2-hour study session, for example, you may need to break after 50 or 55 minutes. In a 3-hour session, you might schedule two breaks, one per hour. A brief 5-minute break will allow you to relax and then return to concentrate better than you would have without taking the break. To avoid stretching breaks beyond 5, or perhaps 10 minutes, you can use a kitchen timer or a watch or radio alarm.

Dealing with Disturbances

To complete assignments on time, to do necessary studying on schedule, and generally to keep abreast of your academic work, you will need to minimize distractions. Insist upon some time when your friends and family may not disturb you. It's difficult to juggle schedules and balance your responsibilities for others with your academic obligations. You will need to be realistic about how much you can do. Be reasonable in assessing what you can accomplish.

Learning to Focus and Concentrate

Having a study schedule and setting goals to achieve them will not be of much use unless you can concentrate and focus your intellectual energy on your study tasks. To concentrate means to zero in on what you wish to read, learn, think about. To do that, you need to find ways to shut out distractions both external and internal.

Essential for concentration is a quiet environment and one in which you have everything you need to do your work. Beyond external quiet, you may need to make an effort to shut out distracting thoughts and create internal quiet. Try to become absorbed in the details of your work and try to avoid giving in to distracting thoughts of what you'll be doing later. When you catch yourself daydreaming or thinking about something other than the task, stop yourself and direct your mind and body back to your work.

It is also essential to have adequate rest and enough to eat.

Another strategy you can use to keep focused is to promise yourself a reward (favorite food, TV show, movie with friends) at the end of your study session. The lure of a well-earned reward will help keep you studying.

Improving Understanding

The following strategies for studying can enhance your understanding of course materials.

1. *Translate* into your own words what you recorded from your instructor in class or what you copied from a textbook. Putting another's idea into your words helps you to clarify your understanding and can make you aware of what you do not understand. When you are able to translate a concept into your own words by paraphrasing or summarizing it, you demonstrate to yourself that you really do understand it.
2. *Convert* words you read or heard into diagrams or pictures that illustrate the idea or process described. Sometimes it is helpful to come at a concept from a different perspective. Visualizing a process by representing it in a diagram and labeling its parts or stages not only helps you "see" it better, but also helps you remember the process.
3. *Associate* what you are learning with what you already know. Link the new and unfamiliar with old and familiar knowledge. All learning, essentially, involves connecting what you don't know with what you do.
4. *Preview* what you are studying when you start (a chapter of a textbook, for example). Previewing a text involves looking it over quickly before diving in deeply and reading and studying it carefully. Previewing gives you a chance to survey the text overall. You can see where it starts, where it ends, and what ground it covers in between.
5. *Review* quickly when you finish studying. A brief review of what you cover during an entire study session helps you do two things: see relationships among parts of the material; and solidify and reinforce what you learned as you focused on the individual parts. Review is an essential part of the study process. Moreover, reviewing should be a regular part of your study habit, whether you are memorizing foreign language vocabulary for a minor quiz or learning economic models for a major exam. Your review-study should also be done regularly—daily or at least a few times a week, and then weekly or biweekly for larger chunks of material, and, finally monthly and quarterly in preparation for major tests.

Remembering What You Have Studied

The first principle of remembering what you have studied is simple: *You cannot remember what you have not learned.*

The second principle is: *Be selective.* You will not be able to remember everything. As a result, you will have to make decisions about what to memorize and what to learn but not learn by heart.

The third principle is: *Associate what you are learning with what you already know.*

Remember that to study effectively you need to approach your study sessions in a proper frame of mind. You need to set a goal and want to achieve it in the time you have available.

DiYanni, Robert. *How to Succeed in College*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1997. pps 90-96.