The Cornell System for Taking Notes

One effective way to take notes in class is to use the system designed by a professor at Cornell University. It works best with loose leaf pages that can be rearranged easily. The steps below describe how it works.

Page Layout (See diagram on the reverse side)

Divide each loose leaf page into three sections

1. The cue/recall column - draw a line down the left hand side of the page about 6 cm in width.
2. The note taking section - the rest of the width of the page.
3. Summary area - Draw a horizontal line about 5 to 6 cm up from the bottom of the page.

1. Cue/Recall column

This area is not used for taking notes during class but will be used later for recall when reviewing your notes. As you review the notes, devise questions which the notes will answer. These questions are the “cues” that help you to clarify meanings, reveal relationships, and strengthen memory of the material. You could also use this area to write an outline of the notes.

2. Note taking section

Lecture notes are written here; you should focus on main ideas rather than try to copy down everything the lecturer says. Below is a basic checklist for taking good notes.

- Put the course name and date on the first sheet of paper and number each page of notes.
- Write in point form rather than in complete sentences, and put information down in your own words, which will require you to see if you understand the material as you write and will help you to remember better when reviewing later.
- If you are using words repeatedly or writing long technical words, establish an abbreviation system that you can use consistently.
- Leave empty spaces to add details later if needed.
- Use outline form or a numbering system to create headings, sub headings and details.
- Draw diagrams and/or pictures where possible to clarify information.
3. **Summary area**

After class you can use this area to write a summary of the information presented in the lecture. Make it a brief concise review of any important material on the page. Again, write in your own words to see if you understand.

**Six Steps for the Best Use of the System**

1. **Record.** During the class take notes as described above, trying to get important facts and details down.

2. **Question.** Set aside 30 minutes after class to go over the notes. Use the cue/recall column to reduce information content to the most important key words, facts and ideas. Write an outline with key words and phrases or formulate questions based on the notes from the right-hand column.

3. **Recite.** Cover the notes, read the questions or cue words you outlined and answer out loud in your own words. This is an effective way to learn because hearing your words and stating ideas challenges you to think about their meaning. After answering, uncover the notes to make sure you remember everything correctly.

4. **Reflect.** As you are reciting, ask yourself other questions about the material, such as “What is the significance of this material?” and “How does it fit in with what I know already?”

5. **Review.** To prevent forgetting, review as often as possible, generally by reciting not just rereading notes. Brief and regular review sessions (10 - 20 minutes a week) will help you retain more and reduce the amount of cramming you will need to do before a test or exam. The cue column is also useful for studying as you have already written the key terms and ideas from each set of lecture notes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cue/Recall Column</th>
<th>Note Taking Column</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Question/Reduce</strong></td>
<td>1. Record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Write key words and phrases from notes.</td>
<td>a) write down key words, facts and ideas in point form in your own words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Make up questions or outline and write in cue column.</td>
<td>b) use abbreviations when possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Recite</td>
<td>c) leave blank spaces to fill in missed information or more details/explanations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Cover notes read question/outline key words</td>
<td><strong>4 &amp; 5 Reflect and Review</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Recite the ideas brought to mind from the notes about each.</td>
<td>a) Reflect on new material and try to fit in with what’s known before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Think about what you have learned from the notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Go over notes regularly to keep fresh and help with retention.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary Area**

**Key Benefits of This Note Taking System**

- Writing notes in your own words makes you understand the material.
- Creating questions/outlines makes you think about what is most important.
- Scheduling regular reviews makes you remember more at test/exam time and requires less need for cramming.