

2. Taking Good Notes

Why Note-Taking?

Get ready. No matter what subject you plan to study in college, you are likely to be swamped with vast amounts of new information. The volume of new ideas, concepts, and facts that will be coming your way is likely to surpass anything you've encountered before. To deal with all this new information, you're going to need some strategies. One key college survival skill is effective **note-taking**.



Making the Case for Note-Taking: The Shaky Truth About Memory

Do you remember what you learned yesterday? How about what you learned last week or last month? If you're like most people, you may remember *some* of the information you encountered—but you have likely forgotten more than you remember.



Research suggests human beings forget 50% of new information within 1 hour of hearing or reading it. That figure rises to 70% in 24 hours and as much as 90% after a week. In short, we humans—all of us—are constantly forgetting! This tendency presents real challenges in college.

Professors will not be happy if on exam day students know only 10% of what they were supposed to learn in a class. Likewise, a doctor who recalls just 10% of what she needs to know to treat a medical condition might cause great harm on the job.

Given the imperfect state of our memory, note-taking is an essential skill in college. And like any skill, it can be improved with practice—which you can begin doing in the pages that follow.

Another Reason to Take Notes: It Helps You Learn

Besides combating forgetfulness, note-taking also improves learning in a number of key ways. First, the act of taking notes makes you more of an *active listener*. Note-taking requires you to be focused and alert as you listen for clues or signals that indicate importance. This active state of mind improves knowledge retention and memory.



Next, as you jot down notes, you're giving yourself extra interactions with the new material. Hearing the material is one interaction; writing it down is a second interaction. Reviewing it later and, perhaps, talking about it to a friend or study partner can add still more interactions. Each instance in which you are engaging with the new material reinforces it in your mind AND increases the likelihood that you'll remember it longer—perhaps permanently.

Finally, as the new information becomes more familiar, you can begin to make connections between it and your existing knowledge. You might think of examples or imagine details of a story or situation that apply to the new information. In this way, you're actually deepening your understanding of the new material instead of forgetting it. In short, note-taking can be a real aid to learning.



ACTIVITY 1: TAKING GOOD NOTES

Choose the best answer for the questions below.

1. TRUE OR FALSE: In general, human beings forget exactly 50% of what they hear within 24 hours.

a. True b. False

2. TRUE OR FALSE: Note-taking is not something that can be learned or improved upon. Students are either good at it or they are not.
- a. True b. False
3. TRUE OR FALSE: Being an active listener is an important part of note-taking.
- a. True b. False
4. TRUE OR FALSE: Reviewing notes and making personal connections to new ideas can aid memory.
- a. True b. False
5. TRUE OR FALSE: Learning to take notes is a key strategy in college that can help in every class.
- a. True b. False



Becoming a Good Note-Taker

Earlier we said that note-taking is a skill that can be improved with practice. It's true. If you want to be a better note-taker, there are some concrete steps you can start taking right now. This section of *Stepping Up* will show you how.



TIPS FOR BEFORE YOU TAKE NOTES

But first things first. **BEFORE** you write a single note in your first class, keep in mind the simple ideas below. Practicing them will benefit you in all your classes and likely improve the overall quality of your notes as you begin your college journey.