

Building Your Note-Taking and Study Skills: A Guide for Students

In the transition to university, students often take a stenographer's approach to note taking ... that they need to record everything they hear. If this is your method, you may miss vast chunks of information as you struggle to write quickly. You can organize your notes in several ways to highlight important concepts or information presented. **Sequential notes** are the most typical kind of notes we see from undergraduates. This involves starting at the top of the page, using the whole width of the page, and developing ideas as you move down the page. Though these are efficient for listing important factual information, they do not illustrate relationships very effectively. Here are a few alternatives to sequential note-taking. These strategies are also effective study skills.



Annotated Note-Taking (Cornell Method)

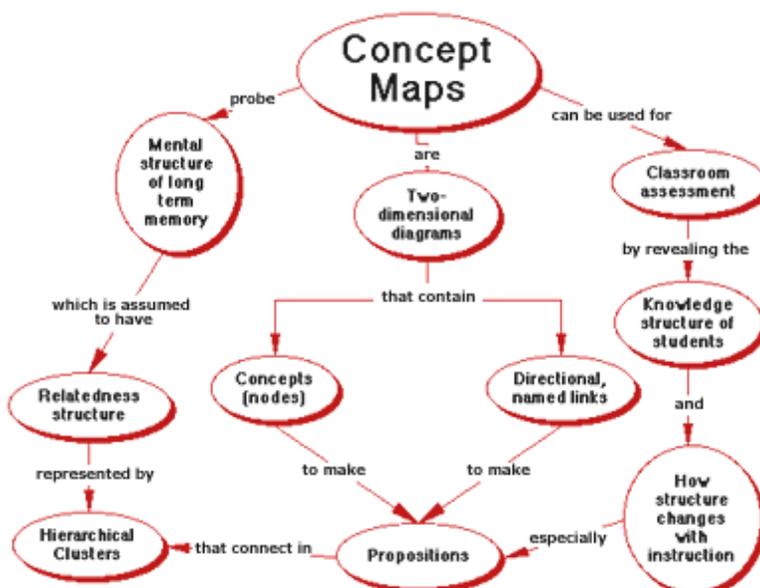
You can maximize the effectiveness of sequential notes by dividing the note pages and annotating them. It allows you to take notes during the lecture, but also reserves space to summarize information, edit notes and insert your own questions and reflections.

Key terms and concepts	Text of the notes recorded	Reflections, ideas and relevant questions
------------------------	----------------------------	---

Think outside the box when using this method. For example, you can optimize page use by organizing your page lengthwise (landscape).

Listen for the lecturer's prompts that indicate when topics change, or when a key concept is introduced. Check for a lecture agenda or outline on the board that indicates which main topics will be covered. Some lecturers provide PowerPoint skeletal notes to students (or make them available on a course website) so you can follow along appropriately.

Concept Mapping



Mapping is a particular style of note-taking in which you build a tree around a central concept. It is very helpful in making relationships clear.

Maps start with a central topic, to which main branches are added, which should be the main subdivisions or the main factors affecting the topic. Next, add the ramifications of or connections to each branch; they describe the relationships between the topics in each branch. When describing each branch, you should ensure that you

use short nouns and descriptive verbs in order to concisely and clearly describe the relationships or effects. Long words and sentences will make these maps cumbersome and hard to follow.

All maps will look different. You should be creative in adapting content to your map.

Matrices

Matrices are an effective way to organize, categorize and otherwise learn the relationships between related aspects of a topic. They are essentially tables where topics are listed for each column and common aspects are listed for each row.

Types of notes	Sequential	Annotated notes	Mapping	Matrix
Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional method 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Editing, summarizing and students' reflections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps define key ideas and relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps define key ideas and relationships
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convenient for students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps with factual data Room for reorganization Encourages reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students discover more relationships Leads to higher-order thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students discover more relationships Leads to higher-order thinking
Format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Verbatim notes No indentation, full sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Left column: topics and summaries Right column: student reflections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key ideas within circles, surrounded by lines connecting to information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A table like this one

Resources

- Kneale, P.E. (2003) Study Skills for Geography Students: A Practical Guide. New York: Oxford UP.
- Landsberger, J. (2004) Study Guides and Strategies. <http://www.studygs.net>.
- Northedge, A. (1990) The Good Study Guide. Milton Keynes: Open University.

ONLINE STUDENTS:

One of the most challenging aspects of online learning is developing a strategy for taking notes. Online students often rely more on course content delivered in text than a normal lecture course. They don't have the audio and visual cues from a lecture to discern what is important to take note of. Too, they often mistakenly think that because the material is already in written form and readily available, there is no point to taking notes on it. Yet note-taking is one of the best memory/learning tools we have,

The blog "Online Courses" offers several note-taking strategies for online students. They are:

- The Cornell Strategy
- The Mapping Strategy
- The Charting Strategy
- The Sentence Strategy
- The Outline Strategy

Get the details on these strategies in their blog post, [Note-Taking Strategies for Online Students](#).

RNDEGREES.net also has several good tips for note taking in an online course. These are:

- Active Reading
- Use Diagrams
- Audio-visual materials
- Note Taking Software
- Reflecting on the Material
- Referencing

[See their site for details.](#)