Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Examine and apply different note taking formats.
2. Explain different memory techniques.
3. Discuss the importance of listening and reading skills.

Written Lecture

Note Taking, Memory Techniques, and Reading Skills

Note Taking

Note-taking, memory and reading strategies are a few of the many strategies that a student can use to improve his or her chance of success in college. One of the most important strategies is note-taking. There are a variety of note-taking techniques that enhance the ability to understand lecture-delivered instruction as well as written information. There is no right or wrong note-taking strategy. Try out different styles and find out for yourself which one fits best with your style of learning!

Note-taking forces a student to pay attention to the information being presented. A student who sits through a video lecture must not only take notes, but must also be a keen observer of the teacher. The teacher may repeat information or give clues about what he or she considers to be the most important information in the lesson. Finally, a student must be able to effectively review notes in order to truly understand the material and prepare for an examination.

Taking Notes While Reading the Textbook

There are several methods of note-taking that have proven to be effective over the years. These methods include: the Cornell System, Outlining, and Mapping. The Cornell System, developed by Walter Pauk of Cornell University, asks a student to use a large loose-leaf notebook. The system involves the use of the following diagram:
The notebook page is divided into several key areas. A student will take notes in the six-inch Note-Taking Area while the instructor is talking or the student is reading material. It is important to remember not to write down what the instructor or text says word-for-word. While writing, the student should write down only essential information and key ideas. He or she may want to use abbreviations in order to expedite the note-taking process. The Cue Column is used only after the notes are written and reviewed. While reviewing notes, the student should jot down cues or reminders that will help the student remember key pieces of information. When studying, cover the Note-Taking Area with a piece of paper. Recite each cue aloud and try to remember the information about the cue that is written in the Note-Taking Area. The cues and speaking aloud help reinforce the information in long-term memory. After speaking aloud, double check the information in the Note-Taking Area to make sure that what is said is correct. Finally, the student should write a few brief sentences in the Summaries section that succinctly summarizes what has been learned. It is important that the summary is written in the student’s own words in order to enhance understanding and recall of the information.

The Outlining Method of note-taking helps a student take notes in a way that shows how information is related. An outline is really just an organized summary of information. An outline is created so that the main points are identified on the left side of the page. Supporting details are then listed under the main point and indented to the right. The supporting details can be labeled with bullet points, letters, slash marks or numbers. An outline is a graphic representation of how the supporting details are related to the main points. An example of the Outlining Method follows:

I. The Battle of Yorktown
   a. Washington and Cornwallis were opposing generals
   b. 1781; last battle of the War for Independence
   c. Resulted in peace negotiations between the colonies and England
Finally, the Mapping Method of note-taking allows the student to organize information in a visual manner. Mapping forces the student to understand how facts and ideas are related to key concepts. The map is a graphic representation of the information presented. In order to create a map of information, the student must first identify the main concept. This concept is listed in the center of the page. The concept is then explained using key words and brief bits of information. An example of a map follows:

**Battle of Yorktown**

- Last battle of the War for Independence
- Washington and Cornwallis were opposing generals
- Resulted in British surrender and the Treaty of Paris

**Memory Techniques**

Memory strategies are another tool that a student can use to improve the chance of success in college. The ability to remember new information is very important. Whether you are trying to remember the name of a person or information for a test, the following memory techniques will help a student recover information from short-term and long-term memory:

1. **Mnemonics:** As discussed in Unit II, mnemonics are memory tools. A mnemonic device helps the student remember complex information in an easy-to-remember format. Mnemonic devices often take the form of a rhyme or a catchy song. A familiar mnemonic device used to remember the order of operations in math is Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally. (Parentheses, Exponents, Multiplication, Division, Addition, Subtraction) Another example is of a rhyming mnemonic that is used to remember when Alaska and Hawaii became states: ’59 was the date, when Alaska and Hawaii became new states. A student who has a visual or auditory learning style is usually successful when using a rhyme or catchy song in order to remember information.

2. **Active Learning:** According to the Air Force Academy (2010), “People remember 90 percent of what they do, 75 percent of what they see and 20 percent of what they hear” (para. 4). Adding movement or activity to oral recitation of new information allows a student to actively engage with the information and remember it more easily.

3. **Recite & Repeat:** Oral repetition of small segments of new information helps “chunk” the information and encode it into long-term memory. Repeat the information multiple times until it is memorized.

4. **Create Pictures:** Draw pictures or diagrams of the information. Pictures and diagrams help right-brain dominant learners better understand and explain abstract information.

5. **Be Organized:** Use outlines, lists, flash cards and graphic organizers in an effort to remember details. Once the information is organized, be diligent to review the information numerous times. Don’t quit until the information is memorized in a logical fashion. Review the information right before a test.

6. **Connect the Information to What Is Already Known:** A student will learn new information more rapidly by comparing it to previously learned material. If possible, apply the information to the student’s
daily life. Any “connection” between the new information and previously learned material will enhance memorization.

7. **30 minutes on/10 minutes off**: Study in short 30—45 minute segments. Take a 10 minute break. Eat a snack or do a physical activity. Food and physical activity will reenergize the body and the mind. When you return for your next 30—45 minute segment, reread the material from the previous segment before moving on to new information. This short review will help lock the information into your memory banks.

8. **Use it or lose it**: Information stored in long-term memory may be difficult to retrieve if a student does not use the information after an extended period of time. Read, write, or speak about the information. These activities will help retrieve the information and enable the student to apply it to current coursework. If a student has difficulty remembering specific information, he or she should try to remember something associated with the information. Thinking or talking about the associated information will eventually trigger the memory of specific information.

**Reading Skills**

Reading is another strategy for improving the chance of success in college. The SQ3R Reading System is a widely used technique that helps improve reading comprehension and retention of material. Of course, the intent of reading is to learn new information. In order to understand and retain the information, a student should try the following techniques:

1. **SQ3R Reading System is considered one of the most effective reading tools.**
   a. **Survey**
      i. Survey your entire reading assignment
   b. **Question**
      i. Consider questions while you are surveying the assignment.
      1. What are the unit objectives?
      2. What do you already know about the topic?
      3. What questions are presented at the end of the chapter?
   c. **Read**
      i. When you read the material look for the answers to the questions you raised.
      ii. Reread underlined, italicized, bold print.
      iii. Slow down your reading when you approach difficult or new material.
      iv. Read in blocks of information.
   d. **Recite**
      i. Recite (out loud or internally) what you have read.
      1. (Remember, if you can’t explain it to someone else—you don’t know it.)
      ii. Write down questions about what you have read.
      iii. Take notes on the material.
   e. **Review**
      i. Review the material on a daily basis before you take a test.
      ii. Modify the method in which you review the material. Some examples on different review strategies:
      1. Make and review flash cards.
2. **Read the material out loud.**
3. **Take notes on the material.**
4. **Review your notes.**
5. **Explain the material to someone else.** (This is the true test that you know the information!)

2. **Use this worksheet to help you apply the SQ3R method.**
3. **Chunk the information you are reading.** Read small segments of information. The student should make sure he or she understands each previously read segment of information before moving on to the next segment of information. The student should ask the instructor for clarification if he or she comes upon information that is difficult to understand.
4. **Read a lot of different types of information.** Develop a broad base of knowledge. A broad background will enable the student to connect previous knowledge to new information.
5. **Understand the proper structure of writing.** In order to fully comprehend written information, it is important for a student to be able to identify the thesis and supporting details of a paragraph. Understanding the logical structure of writing allows the student to grasp how ideas or theories are organized and supported by detailed evidence. Once the student understands an underlying premise and supporting details, he or she will be able to predict future issues or questions that may arise.
6. **Highlight, annotate, question and summarize.** When reading, a student should highlight important passages that help explain the concept or idea being discussed. Annotation allows the reader to write down key questions or thoughts while reading. Verbalize these questions or ideas to others. It is important to discuss the reading with others in order to facilitate understanding. Finally, once all questions have been answered, the student should summarize in oral or written form what is learned from the text. The student should always summarize in his or her own words because this facilitates understanding and encoding the information into long-term memory.
7. **Improve vocabulary.** Read a variety of information in an effort to learn vocabulary that is associated with specific topics. Use a dictionary or thesaurus while reading in case a definition is in doubt. Learn and memorize roots, prefixes and suffixes.

There is no doubt that success in college is highly dependent upon note-taking, memorization and reading skills. A student who strives to improve in these areas will meet with much success in college and throughout life.

**References**


