NOTE TAKING 101

Why?
How?
What?
The following PowerPoint presentation is offered by the Brevard Community College (BCC) – Vocational Program Instruction (VPI) staff as part of an on-going self-study program in the development of effective college study skills and survival techniques. Essential skills and techniques covered in this series will include: Critical Thinking, Note Taking, Reading College Textbooks, TABE English, TABE Math, Test Taking Strategies, Time/Stress Management.

VPI students seeking additional information on these skills and/or TABE remediation and retesting are encouraged to contact a Vocational Learning Specialist in the Learning Lab on any one of BCC’s four campuses:

**Cocoa:** Bldg. 12 – Rm 302  
433-7331

**Melbourne:** Bldg. 2 – Rm 103  
433-5520

**Palm Bay:** Bldg. 1 – Rm 234  
433-5321

**Titusville:** Bldg. 1 – Rm 115  
433-5033
An Overview of NOTE TAKING:

Unfortunately, many students are not adequately prepared for taking effective notes in a college environment. Students who do NOT have good note taking skills will have difficulty getting the most out of class lectures and/or in clearly understanding college textbooks and assigned readings. Effective note taking is just as important as learning how to write a research paper and/or take an exam, yet is a skill that is rarely taught.

The purpose of this slide-presentation is to offer a variety of tips on how to take effective notes, as well as present a variety of basic note taking methods. These methods are defined, advantages and disadvantages are offered, and labeled examples are provided. After reviewing the information in this presentation each learner is encouraged to select/develop a note taking method which best suits their learning style and program.

This presentation is a compilation of materials collected over the years from a variety of sources, authors and institutions. A list of many of these references are provided at the end of this presentation for anyone seeking additional information on this critical skill.

We hope you find this presentation helpful!!

The BCC VPI staff
Why take notes?

- Instructors share information not available in textbooks and then make connections.

- Notes serve as a “file” of information.
  - They become a storehouse of information for later use i.e. preparing for an exam, writing a paper and/or for use in a more advanced course.

- Taking notes helps you become an “active listener” and a “critical thinker”.
  - “Passive” listening is what you do when you watch a sitcom on television or have a casual conversation with someone. “Active” listening is when you listen carefully to make sure you understand and learn the information that is being conveyed.
• Taking notes facilitates learning, by allowing you to become an effective learner.
  - When taking notes you will stay more focused on what is being said or what you are reading; you will be continuously analyzing; you will be forced to think rapidly about what you see and hear.

• Notes help you remember information!
  - According to Walter Pauk in *How to Study in College* (1997) students who do NOT take notes in lecture will lose information as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>After lecture:</th>
<th>Material forgotten:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 minutes</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 weeks</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 weeks</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How to prepare to take notes:

• Review the course syllabus
  - Look for valuable information in the syllabus i.e. course objectives, main topics to be covered, established class schedule, dates of major assignments and exams, grading, and type of exams

• Determine relationship between class and textbook
  - In some courses the textbook is the primary source of information, with class time used to clarify and apply concepts. In other courses, material in class is more important than the textbook.

• Identify the kind of testing
  - Do you need to prepare for multiple choice, short answer or essay type questions? Should your notes be VERY detailed and word-for-word or will you need to take notes that focus on important concepts and relationships between major topics? (Ask your instructor for sample questions; talk to other students who have taken the course; check the reserve desk in the library for old exams.)
**Find a class buddy**

- Having a friend in class can be a lifesaver! If you have to miss class, are unable to take notes, and/or have gaps in your notes you will have someone to help you. Exchange phone numbers with a classmate so that you have a helpful **back up source** if you need it.

**Clarify your feelings**

- You are going to like some courses and not be so enthusiastic about others!! A negative attitude may affect how much effort you put into a class, whether you attend regularly and/or how you take notes. Acknowledge your feelings and **find a positive way to deal** with the situation.

**Adopt a questioning attitude**

- Understand your purpose for taking the course. Ask yourself: "**What am I going to learn today?**" and "**How does this new information/idea fit into what I already know?**"
Choose an effective note-taking system i.e.

- Cornell Method
- Outline
- Mapping
- Charting
- Sentences or Paragraphs
Cornell Note Taking Method

• Description:
  - A systematic format of condensing and organizing notes without need for laborious recopying, by dividing paper into specific sections.

• Method: (R7 - Record, Recall, Reduce, Recapitulate, Recite, Review, Reflect)
  - Divide paper into three sections (2-inch column on left - for “cues”; 6.5 inch “main space” on right - to make notes; 2-inch column on bottom to summarize.)
  - Keep notes during class in “main space”/Each time instructor moves to a new point, skip a few lines
  - After class, complete phrases and sentences as much as possible/write “cues” in left hand column
  - To review - cover “main section” with card; say “cue” out loud and then say as much you can; move card and see if it matches what you wrote.

If you can say it, you know it!!
**Cornell Note Taking Method (R²)**

- **the Template-**

1. **RECORD**
   (during class)
   (1) write down facts and ideas in phrases
   (2) use abbreviations when possible

2. **RECALL**
   (after class)
   (1) read through your notes
   (2) fill in blanks and make “scribbles” more legible

3. **REDUCE**
   (after class)
   (1) key words, phrases or questions that serve as cues
   (2) cue phrases and questions should be in your own words

4. **RECAPITULATION**
   (after class)
   (1) summarize each main idea

5. **RECITE**
   (1) with classroom notes covered, read each key word or question
   (2) recite the fact or idea that comes to mind by the key word or question

6. **REVIEW** and 7. **REFLECT**
   (1) review your notes periodically
   (2) think about what you have learned
### Notetaking Methods

#### Why take notes?
- Active Learner
- Effective learner?
- Walter Pauk?

#### How do you prepare?
- Syllabus ... what's there?
- Test questions vs detail?
- Why need to know?
- Relationship of text to class?
- Why have a class buddy?

#### Why??
- Instructors share information
- Serve as "file" of information
- Help you become "active listener"
- Helps you become "effective learner"
- HELP YOU REMEMBER INFORMATION!! (Walter Pauk?)

#### How to Get Ready?
- Review syllabus
  - course objectives
  - main topics
  - assignments
  - ???
- Relationship between class and text
- Identify testing
  - types of questions
  - concepts vs details in notes
  - ask instructor & other students
- Class buddy
- Why need/taking course (like or NOT)
- Choose effective method

#### 5. Recite:

1. Record
2. Recall
3. Reduce
4. Recapitulate
5. Note taking is important part of successful college studying. "A" students need to understand WHY and HOW good notes will help them get good grades.

Studied student retention rates, wrote books on studying i.e. How to Study in College, 1997

Class schedule, website, test dates, instructor office hours, etc.

Is text important ... supplement or info NOT discussed in class
Cornell Method (continued)

- **When to use:**
  - In ANY lecture situation

- **Advantages:**
  - Provides an organized and systematic means for recording and reviewing notes
  - Easy format for pulling out major concepts and ideas
  - Simple and efficient
  - Saves time and effort
  - A “Do-it-right-in-the-first-place” method

- **Disadvantages:**
  - None
Outline Method

- **Description:**
  - Starting with general information at the left, with more specific facts and clarifications indented to the right

- **Method:**
  - Listen and then write down points in organized pattern, based on space indentation
  - Place major points farthest to the left and indent each more specific point to the right
  - Levels of importance will be indicated by distance away from major point
  - Indentation can be simple (no marking, just space relationships) or more complex, by using Roman numerals, letters and/or decimals
I. Why take Notes?
- Instructors give additional information
- Notes serve as “information file”
- Facilitates learning
  > active listener
  > critical thinker

II. How to Prepare:
- Review syllabus
  > course objectives
  > topics to be covered
  > dates of assignments/exams
  > grading
- Relationship of class to textbook
- Determine kind of testing
  > multiple guess
  > short answer
  > essay
- Have a class buddy
- Pick a method i.e.
  > Cornell
  > Outline
  > Mapping
  > Charting
  > Sentences/Paragraphs

1. “more” Specific Points
Outline (continued)

• When to use:
  - When lecture is organized and sequential
  - There is enough time in lecture to think about and make organizational decisions

• Advantages:
  - Well organized system, if done correctly
  - Reduces need to edit
  - Easy to turn main points into questions

• Disadvantages:
  - Requires more thought in class for accurate organization
  - May not show relationships by sequence when needed
  - Doesn’t lend to itself to variety of review and question applications
  - VERY difficult if lecturer speaks fast
Mapping Method

• **Description:**
  - A graphic means of representing information, which relates each fact/idea to every other fact or idea.

• **Method:**
  - Determine the “subject/topic”. Write this title in the center of page with a circle around it.
  - As you major facts (subheadings) are presented that relate to the subject/topic, draw lines out from the circle and label.
  - As additional facts are presented that relate to each subheading, draw these lines, linked to appropriate major fact and label.
  - Continue process as more defining facts or ideas are presented.
Note taking

I.
   A.
   B.
   1.
   2.
   a.

Subheadings/Major Ideas

Supporting Ideas/Facts

Subject/Topic

Additional facts/support

7/2/08
Mapping (continued)

- **When to use:**
  - When lecture content is well organized
  - Often effective with guest lecturer and have no idea how lecture will be presented
  - Effective if you are mainly a “visual” learner

- **Advantages:**
  - Helps keep visual track of lecture
  - Relationships easy to see
  - Can cover lines for memory review and relationships

- **Disadvantages:**
  - You may not hear changes in content from major points to facts
  - Can be visually overwhelming
Charting Method

• **Description:**
  - A use of columns with appropriate heading labels in a table format i.e. material offered in chronological order

• **Method:**
  - Determine categories to be covered in lecture
  - Set paper up ahead of time by drawing columns with determined categories as headings for each
  - Place information in appropriate columns
# Notetaking Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Cornell | - divide paper in sections  
(recall column, record column, recapitulate column)  
7Rs - Record, Recall, Reduce, Recapitulate, Recite, Review, Reflect | - organized  
- systematic  
- simple/efficient | - NONE | ANY lecture |
| Outline | - points organized based on importance  
- relationships established by indenting | - well-organized  
- easy to review | - may not show sequence as needed | - when lecture is organized  
- enough time to make org. decisions |

### Modern History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Important People</th>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1941-45</td>
<td>FDR</td>
<td>WWII</td>
<td>USA involvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Charting (continued)

- When to use:
  - When test will focus on both facts and relationships
  - When you want an overview on one piece of paper in sequence

- Advantages:
  - Reduces amount of writing needed
  - Provides easy review mechanism
  - Facilitates both memorization and compare/relate

- Disadvantages:
  - Need to learn how to develop effective categories
  - Must be fully engaged in lecture
Sentence/Paragraphs

- **Description:**
  - Record of complete thoughts/concepts.

- **Method:**
  - Write every new thought, fact or topic presented
  - Use a “new“ line for each new thought/fact
  - Number lines as you progress
1. We take notes: when instr. offers “new” ideas; to facilitate learning and/or remember info.

2. To take notes need to prepare i.e. rev. syllabus; compare txt/class; identify test types (i.e. mult. choice; short ans. or essay); find a class buddy; develop ? attitude and select effective method (i.e. Cornell, Outline, Mapping, Charting, Sentence/Para.)

Numbered thoughts, facts or ideas

Use abbreviations to expedite process
**When to use:**
- When lecture is *somewhat organized*
- *Heavy content* which comes very fast
- Instructor *presents in point fashion*, but not in list i.e. “three related points”

**Advantages:**
- *Gets more or ALL of information*

**Disadvantages:**
- Can’t determine major vs minor points from numbered sequence
- *Difficult to edit* without having to totally rewrite
You have the methods ... so here are some **Basic Tips**:

- Concentrate on lecture or reading
- Take notes **selectively** ... do NOT try to write every word
  - Average lecturer speaks approx. 125-140 word per minute/average note-taker writes at approx. 25 words per minute
- Use your **own** words
- Be **brief** ... focus on major points and important information
- Write **legibly**
- Don’t worry about grammar or spelling
Know WHAT to Write - (How to Recognize/Remember the Important Stuff!?!)

- Instructors usually pause before or after an important idea.

- Instructors tend to write important ideas on the board, overhead and/or PowerPoint.

- Instructors often use repetition to emphasize an important point.

- Most instructors use introductory phrases i.e. “A point to remember ...” or “A critical consideration ...”
Know **WHAT to Write** (cont.)

- You need to mark ideas emphasized in lecture with an arrow or other special symbol.

- You need to take down examples which the instructor presents and “note” them with “EX”.

- You need to pay close attention to transitional words and phrases. Listen for words such as “therefore”, “finally”, and “furthermore”. These words usually signal an important idea.
Know WHAT to Write (cont.)

- You need to listen for **signal words**
  - that lead to **main ideas/points:**
    - “There are three reasons why ... “
    - “First ... Second ... Third ... “
    - “... and most important ... “
    - “A major development ... “
  - that indicate **support material:**
    - On the other hand ... “
    - “For example ... “
    - “For instance ... “
    - “Similarly ... “
    - “Also ...“
    - “Furthermore ...“
    - “In contrast ...“
Signal words (cont.)

- that signal conclusion or summary:
  - “Therefore ... “
  - “In conclusion ... “
  - “As a result ... “
  - “Finally ...”
  - In summary ... “
  - “From this we can see ... “

- that are often said VERY loud:
  - “Now this is important ... “
  - “Remember that ... “
  - “The important idea is that ... “
  - “The basic concept here is ... “
NOTE TAKING is a critical college success skill. The more you practice, the more proficient you will become. If you select a method and use it often, you can really improve your techniques. With good note taking techniques, you will soon be able to record the fastest instructor to your satisfaction and have a great study tool to use when preparing for your assignments and exams!!
References:

**STUDY SKILLS TEXTS:**

Ellis, Dave. *Becoming a Master Student*. St. Charles, IL: Houghton Mifflin. (editions 9th-12th) 2005 through 2009


**WEB SITES:**


“*Lecture Note Taking.*” Retrieved April 1, 2008 from College of Saint Benedict/Saint John’s University, academic Advising web site: [http://www.csbsju.edu/academicadvising/help/le](http://www.csbsju.edu/academicadvising/help/le)

“*Learning Consultant Services - Studying and Writing Effectively: Notetaking During Class.*” Retrieved April 1, 2008 from Mount Royal College, Learning Skills Centre Web site: [http://www.mtroyal.ca/learningskills](http://www.mtroyal.ca/learningskills)


“*Note Taking System.*” Retrieved April 3, 2008 from California Polytechnic State University, Student Academic Services Web site: [http://sas.calpoly.edu/asc/ssl.html](http://sas.calpoly.edu/asc/ssl.html)