

Notetaking methods

Effective notes

Taking good notes helps you remember what you have learned through readings and lectures. Quality notes are a valuable tool to use while studying and preparing for exams.

Selecting your method

Notetaking is personal! No single method will work for everyone, so try out a few of the methods below and figure out what works for you.

Notetaking tips

- Write in phrases, not sentences
- Record key words
- Summarize the material in your own words
- Use abbreviations and symbols
- Remove distractions such as your phone and choose a study location that will allow you to focus
- Refer back to your notes regularly to incorporate new information
- If possible, opt for taking notes by hand rather than typing

Method:

Outline

Create a structure that starts with broader points, and then use indentations to add details for each topic.

Advantages

- Provides an easy to follow structure
- Outlines content and hierarchical relationships
- Limited editing is needed
- Easy to review material

Disadvantages

- Can be too structured for some students
- Can be difficult to show some types of ordered relationships or patterns
- May not show comparisons or connections well

Always add the date to your notes! This will help you find and refer to them later.

Class title **Date**

- This is a your main topic
 - Here is a sub topic
 - This is an example related to the topic
 - Here is another sub topic of the main topic
 - This is an example
 - This is another example
 - This is a date or fact related to the sub point
- This is another main topic
 - Here is a sub topic
 - This is an example related to the topic
 - Here is another sub topic of the main topic
 - This is an example
 - This is a date or fact related to the sub point
 - This is another date or fact
 - Here is an additional piece of information

Method:

Cornell notes

Divide the page into four sections. During class or while reading, fill in the right section. After your class or reading, go back to the left to add prompts, and summarize the whole page in the bottom section.

Advantages

- An organized system for writing and reviewing notes
- Easy way to identify important topics and questions
- Ready-made summaries of content

Disadvantages

- Takes time to set up the system
- Limited space to record information on each page
- Might be too rigid a structure for some learners

Class title	Date
After class Fill in this section with main topics, prompts, and questions	During class • Write key pieces of information
Use the items in this section to quiz yourself!	
Summary • After class, write a summary of the content on this page	

Method:

Charting

Decide on categories to divide up the content you are learning. Fill each section with a summary of information for that category.

Advantages

- Helpful to compare and contrast information
- Easily visualize relationships
- Consolidate information from other notes
- Pull out information quickly

Disadvantages

- Can be difficult to decide upon the categories
- Limited space to record information in each section
- Not well suited for fast-paced or unstructured lectures

Class title	Date	
Topic	Info 1	Info 2

Method:

Concept mapping

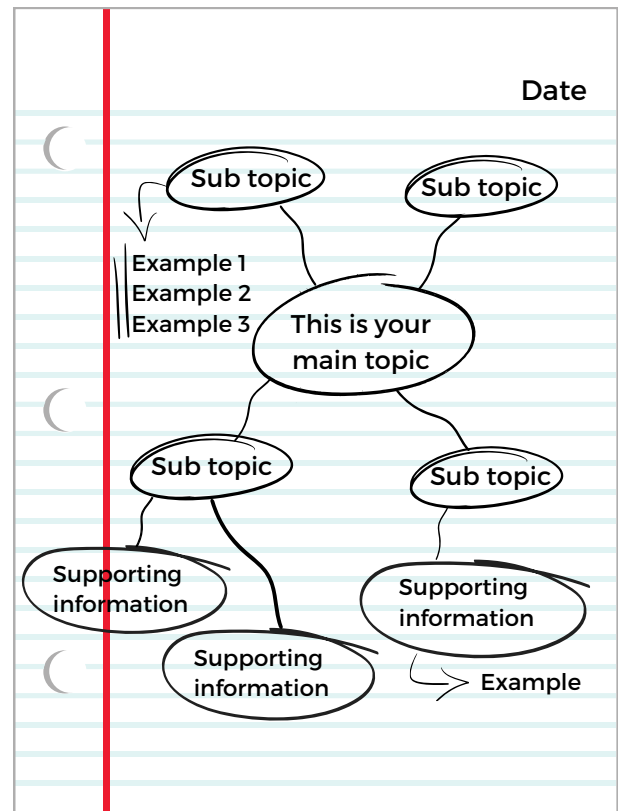
This is a visual way to demonstrate relationships between content. Begin in the center with a core topic, and then link out to nodes around that topic.

Advantages

- Easy to engage in self-study for exam prep
- Creates a one-page representation of important ideas
- Shows relationships between ideas
- Can help create questions or identify points of confusion in material

Disadvantages

- Could become messy
- can be hard to create during a lecture, may be better suited for review
- There is limited space for notes or explanations



Check out [McGill Library's guide to concept maps](#) for more information on tools and examples!

Method:

Flow notes

Organize information spatially, connecting with lines, arrows, or even images. Avoid transcribing the information and focus on creating a mental picture of the topics and how they connect.

Advantages

- Encourages very active engagement with the material
- Flexible and adaptable
- Can show relationships between ideas
- Supports comprehension of material

Disadvantages

- Might be too messy for some
- Lack of explicit structure
- Potential for information overload

