



Figure 1 Logos for the Academic Resource Center and The Writing Center

Taking Notes

In this handout we will discuss note taking. Note taking is extremely important in college. We will cover some note taking methods and helpful note taking tips.

When to take Notes:

It is scientifically proven that when people take hand-written notes, they are more likely to remember information. Therefore, note-taking is an important part of the learning experience. It is usually done during class lecture, but it is also a good idea to take notes while reading a textbook.

Note Taking Methods:

There are different methods for note taking, but the most common method is **the outline method**. An outline is the breakdown of a subject from general ideas to specific ideas. Information is organized into **main topics**, **subtopics**, and **supporting details**. Usually, the subtopics are indented more than the main topics, and the supporting details are indented even further to help make the notes easier to read. *See the example on the next page:*

The Outline Format: Example

<p><u>I. First main topic</u></p> <p>A. Subtopic</p> <p> 1. Detail</p> <p> 2. Detail</p> <p>B. Subtopic</p> <p> 1. Detail</p> <p> 2. Detail</p> <p><u>II. Second Main Topic</u></p> <p>A. Subtopic</p> <p> 1. Detail</p> <p> 2. Detail</p>
--

<p><u>I. Pet Ownership</u></p> <p>A. Choosing the right pet</p> <p> 1. Common pets: dogs, cats hamsters, rats, fish</p> <p> 2. Where to buy: Shelters, and Rescue centers. Do not go to breeders!</p> <p>B. What pet is right for you?</p> <p> 1. Some need lots of care</p> <p> 2. Some are more self-sufficient</p> <p><u>II. The needs of each pet</u></p> <p>A. Dogs</p> <p> 1. Needs lots of attention: Bonding, exercising, discipline</p> <p> 2. Be ready to commit</p>
--

Numbering your outline

A common way of numbering an outline is some combination of Roman numerals, the alphabet, and numbers. For example, the main topics use Roman numerals (I, II, III, IV, V); the subtopics use the alphabet (A, B, C, D, E); and the supporting details use numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5). The idea is to use a different numbering system for each one the main in order to tell them apart. Remember, it is a good idea to leave a lot of blank space underneath main topics and subtopics in case you hear or read a detail later that you want to add to that section. Below is an example:

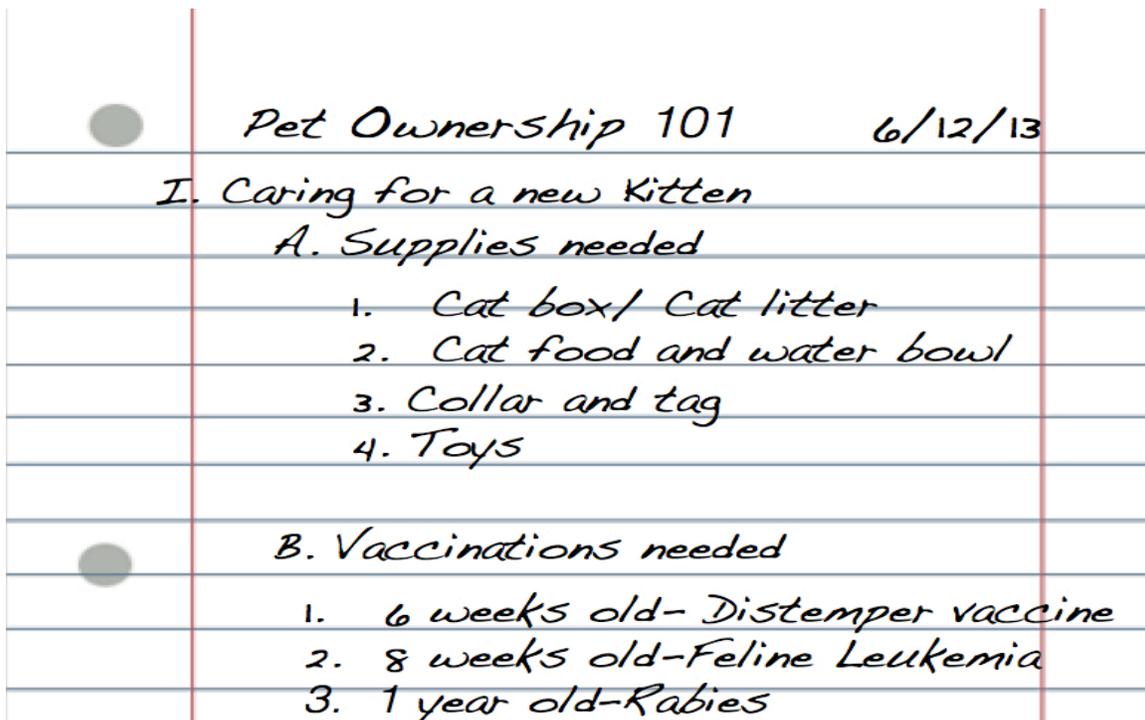


Figure 2 Example of organized notes

How to fill in your outline:

It can sometimes be difficult to decide what information to put into your outline. Think about the logical progression from general information to specific information. For example, “caring for a new kitten” is a main topic because it is more general, and “supplies needed” is a sub-topic because it is still general, but it is specifically related to the main topic. “Cat box/cat litter” is a supporting detail because it is part of a very specific list of items.

Another method of taking notes:

The **Cornell System** is another helpful way to organize your notes that might be helpful to you. This system was developed in the 1950’s by a professor who graduated from Cornell University. It is similar to the outline, but it adds a column on the side for keywords, and a section at the bottom for a summary of the notes on that page.

To set up your paper for the Cornell System, create two columns by drawing a line vertically down your piece of paper. Do not draw the line all the way to the bottom of the paper. Leave about 2 inches of space at the bottom. The left hand column should be about 2 ½ inches across, and the right hand column should be

larger at about 6 inches across. Toward the bottom of the paper, draw a line horizontally all the way across the paper. This is the line separating the 2 inches you left at the bottom. Below is an example of what your Cornell Notes should look like:

Cornell Two-Column Notes	
Keywords:	Notes:
	Types of Matter
Solids	I. Solids A. Have a definite shape B. Have a definite volume
Liquids	II. Liquids A. Do not have a definite shape B. Have a definite volume
Gases	III. Gases A. Do not have a definite shape B. Do not have a definite volume
Summary: The 3 types of matter are solid, liquid and gas. They are differentiated by shape and volume.	

Figure 3 Example of Cornell two column method

Tips for Taking Notes During a Lecture

Understand the Material

- Do not write down everything the teacher says word for word. Listen to them for a few sentences and then think of a short summary of what they just said. The goal of taking notes is to understand the material presented, not to see how fast you can write.
- Sometimes taking notes during a lecture can seem overwhelming, especially if the teacher talks quickly. Do not worry too much about spelling or grammar when taking notes during a lecture. The main thing to

worry about is understanding the information presented and writing it down in a way you can remember.

- You can use abbreviations and short sentences while taking notes to make it faster and easier.
- Studies show that 80% of new material can be recalled if you review notes within the first 24 hours of presentation, so don't just take notes and set them aside, review them right away to better understand the material.

Listen for Supporting Details and Key Terms

- Some things to look for when deciding what your supporting details will be are important dates, events, and people. Writing down a person's name, and then a short summary of who they are, what theory they came up with, or what important thing they accomplished, is an example of a supporting detail.
- Another thing to listen for are key terms. Key terms are words or phrases that are important to the subject you are learning. For example, "thesis statement" is a key term in an English class. In many cases, they will be the terms that you have never heard before. Always try to write down words or phrases you never heard before, and their definition. If you are unclear of the definition after the lecture, go look it up. Even if you have heard the word before, write down the definition your teacher or textbook gives you for the term because it might be different than the definition you learned before taking the class.
- If the teacher uses a PowerPoint Presentation to lecture, a basic outline is usually already done for you. This can make taking notes a bit easier. The main subject of the entire presentation can be used as the main topic, and the titles of each slide can act as the subtopics. Usually, they will also include major supporting details, but you may want to add more on your own from the lecture.

- If the teacher is not using a PowerPoint presentation, they may still write down key terms on a chalkboard or dry erase board.

Additional help with Note-Taking

- Some people record their teacher's lectures on small, portable recording devices. This can be helpful, but do not rely on it instead of taking notes. **In order to help your brain absorb the information, you really need to write things down!** Also, always remember to ask the teachers permission before recording their lecture.
- Many teachers recommend re-typing your notes in complete sentences on a computer after class. This helps avoid the problem of remembering what your abbreviations meant, and makes them very easy to read when you study for the test later. This will also help you remember the information.

Tips for Taking Notes When Reading



Figure 4 Reading Duck

- When reading, the main topics and subtopics are usually written in **bold**, underlined, or separated from the rest of the text in some way.
- If you look at your textbook's table of contents, usually you will see something that resembles an outline. Most text books are already broken down into the main topics and subtopics that are covered throughout that chapter. It is then your job to decide what information to add as your supporting details. Remember to look for key terms, dates, events, theories, and people.
- Again remember try not to write down the information in the book word for word, just like with a lecture. You need to paraphrase what you have just

read. Paraphrasing means that you write a short summary of what you just read in your own words. Try not to quote the material at all when you do this. Re-read the section of text you want to paraphrase until you understand its full meaning, and then try to write that meaning down in one or two sentences. These sentences will usually be part of your supporting details. This will help you understand what you are reading better.

- Look for key word or key term lists. Many textbooks will have these at the beginning of the chapter, or in the margin next to the text. Some even highlight those key words in bold when they appear in the text (like this handout).

Exercise:

Read the following passage and then fill in the blanks areas of the outlined notes located on the following page:

Baking a Cake for Beginners



Before You Begin Baking:

Baking a cake may seem simple, but if you have never done it before, it can be confusing. There are steps you must take before you even get started. In this lesson, we will be making a yellow cake. First, you will need to make sure you have all the items needed to make the cake: butter, flour, sugar, eggs, milk, mixing bowls, vanilla extract, baking powder, and salt. Set the cube of butter out on the counter, and let it get soft for an hour or two before you begin.

Step 1: Creaming the Butter:

First, mix 1 cup of white sugar and the cube of soft butter in the large mixing bowl. (Make sure you do not throw away the wrapper from the butter, you will need it later.) This process of mixing the butter and sugar is commonly known as “creaming” the butter. Mix vigorously for two minutes. Make sure the two ingredients really meld together into a soft ball of batter.

Step 2: Mixing the Dry and Wet Ingredients:

Mix the rest of the dry ingredients together in the smaller mixing bowl. 1-teaspoon baking powder, 2-cups of flour, and 1-teaspoon salt. You can easily mix these ingredients together with just a regular dinner fork.

Next, mix the wet ingredients. In this case, use 1 cup of milk, 3 eggs, and 1-teaspoon of vanilla extract. First, beat the eggs with a fork inside the two-cup measuring cup. Then add 1-cup of milk and 1-teaspoon of vanilla. Leave this mix in the measuring cup for the moment.

Step 3: Putting it All Together:

Now add $\frac{1}{4}$ of the liquid mix into the creamed butter and sugar. Next, add $\frac{1}{4}$ of the dry mix to the creamed butter and sugar. Alternate between the two until both the wet and dry batter are mixed into the creamed butter and sugar. Make sure the mix is smooth, and try to get rid of as many lumps as possible.

Step 4: Greasing the Pan and Putting it in the Oven:

This is when you need the wrapper from your cube of butter. To “grease” the two 9-inch round cake pans, rub just a little bit of the butter all over the inside of the pan. Using the greasy side of the butter wrapper is a good way to do this. Next, pour the batter into the pans. Try to put an equal amount in each. Then, bake at 350 degrees for 30-40 minutes. To see if it is done, stick a knife in the center of one of the cakes. If it comes out clean, it is done. The cake will also turn a golden brown color. Let it cool for twenty minutes. We will discuss removing the cake from the pans and frosting it in our next lesson.

Exercise instructions: Now that you have finished reading the passage, fill in the blanks areas of the outlined notes below. Think about the logical progression from general to specific, as well as the addition of supporting details, as discussed earlier in this hand out. The first one has been completed for you as an example.

Baking a _____

I. Before you Begin:

1. Making a yellow cake

A. Get all of these items:

a.

B. Set butter on counter

II. Step 1: _____

1. The process of mixing

A. Mix _____ and _____

This is called: _____

B. Mix for _____ minutes

C. Make sure it's a soft ball of _____

III.

Step 2: _____

1. Separately mix the _____ and _____ ingredients

A. Mix dry ingredients:

B. Mix wet ingredients:

IV. Step 3 _____

1. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ of _____ and $\frac{1}{4}$ of _____ ingredients to _____ butter mixture

A. Do this back and forth

2. Stir until smooth

V. Step 4: _____

1. Grease the _____

A. Use butter wrapper

2. Pour batter into pans

3. Bake for _____ mins

A. Test if it's done by _____

This handout is based on the following texts: Note Taking Systems." *Sas.calpoly.edu*. California Polytechnic State University, 2007. Web. 13 June 2013 "Paraphrase: Write it in your own words." *The Purdue OWL*. Purdue U Writing Lab, 21 Apr. 2010. Web. 13 June 2013. Pauk, Walter. "The Cornell Note-taking System." *How to Study in College*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001. N. pag. Print. Find us on-line at www.lavc.edu/writingcenter last revised August 2017