



## How To: Take Effective Class Notes: Strategic Note-Taking

Students who lack an efficient strategy for note-taking can miss important lecture information, fail to make meaningful connections between facts and ideas being shared, and overlook critical new vocabulary terms. Strategic note-taking (Boyle, 2013) primes students to more fully understand lecture content through activating prior knowledge of the topic, monitoring teacher cues that mark key points to be included in notes, recording novel vocabulary items, and pondering interconnections between lecture points.

**Materials.** To use strategic note-taking, the student will require:

- *Strategic Note-Taking: Worksheet (attached).* The student uses this 3-page set of forms to record lecture notes. (NOTE: The student should have sufficient copies of the second/middle of the worksheet to capture all lecture notes.)

**Procedure.** At the start of a lecture, the student uses the *Strategic Note-Taking: Worksheet* as a graphic organizer to accomplish the following steps and tasks:

- *Activate prior knowledge.* The student opens the session by recording the lecture topic and jotting down those facts, ideas, or concepts associated with the topic that the student can retrieve from memory.
- *Record key lecture points.* During lecture, the student monitors the teacher's presentation for two types of cues that serve as markers for significant content: (1) 'importance' cues: e.g., "This is a really crucial fact..."; (2) Numeric cues: e.g., "The fourth reason for economic decline in during the Great Depression was..." When the student observes an importance or numeric cue, the student writes down the associated lecture point and any supporting details. NOTE: The student is recording 3-5 main points per notes page.
- *Flag new vocabulary.* When unfamiliar vocabulary terms appear in the lecture, the student writes those terms in the appropriate space on the worksheet for later study.
- *Make connections between lecture points.* When a note-taking sheet is filled, the student takes a moment to describe the relationship between key lecture points before advancing to a new sheet. NOTE: To keep this operation brief and manageable, the student performs the 'connections' step after every 3-5 new lecture points.
- *Conclude note-taking by summarizing main points.* At the conclusion of the lecture, the student skims the notes and sums up the 5 most important points--as a way to imprint in memory the main ideas of the lecture.

**Training.** Students will need at least 2 training sessions to use strategic note-taking effectively. When presenting this strategy, the teacher should follow a direct-instruction format (Burns, VanDerHeyden, & Boice, 2008):

1. the instructor demonstrates and models the note-taking strategy;
2. students are paired off to use the strategy and provide peer feedback while observing a live or video lecture;
3. students use the strategy independently with the teacher occasionally reviewing and providing feedback about the quality of their notes.

**References**



Boyle, J. R. (2013). Strategic note-taking for inclusive middle school science classrooms. *Remedial and Special Education, 34*(2), 78-90.

Boyle, J. R., & Weishaar, M. (2001). The effects of strategic notetaking on the recall and comprehension of lecture information for high school students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 16*(3), 133-141.

Burns, M. K., VanDerHeyden, A. M., & Boice, C. H. (2008). Best practices in intensive academic interventions. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), *Best practices in school psychology V* (pp.1151-1162). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.



**Strategic Note-Taking: Worksheet** (Boyle, 2013; Boyle & Weishaar, 2001)

First Page #:   1   Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Course/Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Topic.** Write the topic of today's lecture: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Background Knowledge.** Before the lecture, jot down anything that you already know about this topic (in sentences, phrases, or keywords):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Main Points:** Record any new important points and related details covered in this part of the lecture:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Summary:** Before continuing with your note-taking, write briefly of how the key points listed above are related to each other:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Vocabulary:** Jot down new vocabulary terms from this part of the lecture:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_





Page #: \_\_\_\_\_ Course/Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Lecture Topic: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**FINAL PAGE: Lecture Summary:** At the end of the lecture, write down five of the most important points covered in this session. For each point, include supporting details:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_