

Cornell Note Taking System

People tend to remember much more of what they say and write than what they hear. Some researchers have found that we forget as much as eighty percent of what we hear within the first 24 hours. This makes sense given the capacity of short-term memory is about 5 to 9 pieces of information at a time. Older information makes way for new. This is why lectures often make sense at the time, but the details are not always memorable. Good notes are therefore an important tool. They can provide you an opportunity to capture what was said so that you can practice later. Having a good note taking system can help. The Cornell Note taking system is a five-step method that can help you pick out the main ideas in class to write down, as well as a method that can help you prepare for tests.

To prepare, take your notebook paper and draw a vertical line straight down the page approximately 3 inches to the left of the left side of the page, dividing your paper into a one-third and two-thirds sections.

Recall Column 3 inches wide	Record column 6 inches wide
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Step 1: Record during class. During lecture, write as many facts as you can, but as briefly as you can in the “record” column. Use abbreviations and shortened phrases to get the full idea. Leave spaces between ideas so you can fill in more later.

Step 2: Reduce after class. As soon after class as possible (within 24 hours), summarize these ideas and facts in as few words as possible in the “recall” column. This helps show relationships between points and strengthens memory. It also prepares you for exams gradually and well ahead of time.

Step 3: Recite from recall column. Cover the main or record column. Using only the words in the recall column, repeat the facts as fully as you can remember them, in your own words. Then uncover your notes and check what you have said against the facts. This will help transfer ideas to your long-term memory.

Step 4: Reflect on possible test questions and mark unclear points. Thinking helps make sense out of the notes by finding relationships and order in the material. Try to put ideas in categories and tie old material to the new. Also, think about which points will appear on tests and mark any concepts you are unclear on so you can ask questions about them before the next lecture.

Step 5: Review to improve memory. Spending a few minutes every week to review your notes, will help you retain most of what you have learned, and you will relate the facts and ideas from earlier material to present lectures or readings.

From: Chapter 6, *How to Study in College*, by Walter Pauk 3rd Edition, 1985.