



# NOTE TAKING & RETENTION

Below are suggestions for improving note taking and retention skills. If you find you are struggling with these or other academic skills, contact the Counseling and Testing Center by calling or visiting our website to learn more about the many services available, such as an appointment with an Academic Specialist.

## **Taking Notes: The Basics**

- Clear, concise notes are more effective than copious notes.
- Instead of using a spiral, use a loose-leaf notebook divided into class sections.
- Make all notes on loose-leaf paper. In an upper corner title and date each sheet as you use it.
- Rewrite and combine your old study and lecture notes into a new single set of notes or outline. Use them as a replacement for your old notes in the loose-leaf binder. An organized system of course notes gives you complete control of and fast access to a crucial part of the learning process!

## **Lecture Notes**

- Sit near the front of the class to avoid distractions.
- Be a good listener – Focus and concentrate on the main points of the lecture. Get them down on paper. You'll put them into your own words later along with your study notes. Pay attention to instructor's clues as to what they consider important.
- If there is something you don't understand, ASK!
- Immediately after a lecture, without looking at your notes, try to recall on a separate paper as much as you can about what you have heard and learned. Then review your actual lecture notes to confirm and/or supplement your memory.
- During your next study session, quickly recall again on paper what you learned. Then review and reorganize your lecture notes in your own words.
- Repeat the recall process several times over several days to commit the new information to memory!
- Your listening skills, note taking, and ability to manage your sessions will be the prime determinant of college success!

## Dealing with Professors & Tough Classes

- Go see the professors during their posted office hours. They must sit there whether you show up or not so take advantage of the opportunity.
- Don't be afraid to ask other students and professors for copies of old exams. The questions may change but the style usually remains the same.
- Make sure your professor knows your name. Putting a face with a name will be a big help, especially if your grade is on the borderline.
- Problems with faculty should be handled directly, honestly, and calmly. If the problem remains unresolved, seek advice from your academic advisor, a student support services staff member, or your student handbook as to the next step.

## Time Management

- Learn to say no. Saying no to partying, movies, etc. does not make you a terrible person. It means you are prioritizing.
- Do not study for more than 2 hours at a time. Your brain really does shut down and any studying you do after that point is just a waste of time.
- Use travel time to study. Pop a study or lecture tape into your car's cassette player; put on those earphones if you ride the train or carpool. If you use a laundromat, listen to study tapes while your clothes spin and dry.
- Try to study during daylight hours. Natural light really is more conducive to learning.
- Use 2 schedules. 1st Schedule: create an hour by hour weekly schedule. Using your class schedules as a guide, block out specific times each day for study and all other activities; RULE OF THUMB: one and a half hours of study for each hour of class. 2nd Schedule: create a semester schedule showing midterms, finals, due dates, and other important events. Weekly review both schedules and allow more study time as needed. A good schedule keeps you from wandering off course.
- Prioritize. Daily, list what you need to study, prioritize & set times for each item.
- Use the 30-3-2 schedule: Study for 30-minutes; Take a 3-minute break, let the break be a time to think about other things; take an extra 2 minutes to mentally review what you have just read and do a quick preview of what is coming up next! Study – Break – Review – Preview – Study

## Study, Study, Study

- Attend as many academic support activities and workshops as possible. They are usually free and are always helpful.
- Study! This may be a case of stating the obvious, but you would be surprised how many students don't bother.
- Studying space is important. Soothing music in the background (contrary to popular opinion) can enhance your concentration. Floral scented candles and mixed floral

potpourri facilitate learning (strange, but true). Studying in a soft chair or on a cushy bed may not be the best strategy. Active learning may require walking around the room or sitting on the edge of the chair. Wake up your body—Wake up your mind. Your regular study space should be as quiet and comfortable as possible and large enough to have easy access to everything you need for studying (text & reference books, paper, pencils, rulers, etc.) Libraries, study lounges, or private rooms are ideal. Get rid of clutter. Clear the desk or table of all materials not related to the current project.

- Tutoring is not a negative thing. Get help early before the academic damage is irreversible. Many schools offer free tutoring in a variety of subject. Study groups are great, as they force you to explain the material.

### **Can You Remember?**

- Memorize from general to specific. Study the big picture, then learn the details. Learning and memorization are like a funnel—the process is not very effective when the small end is at the top.
- Cramming does not work. Cramming for an exam only commits the information to your short-term memory. You will forget what you never really learned.
- Reasons why we forget pieces of information: We don't use the information, confuse it with other information, decide the information does not match what we already believe, never really learned the information in the first place.

### **Keys to Remembering**

- Be interested in the information, pay attention, consciously choose to remember, and establish a need to remember.
- Visualize: Picture in your mind what you wish to remember.
- Relate: Relate and form associations between the new ideas and information you wish to remember and information, ideas, persons, things, etc. that you already know.
- Repeat: Even though something is initially learned, it will more than likely be forgotten if not over learned. Be sure to repeat information in your own words.
- Fill in blanks: Make your own flash cards by writing “fill in the blank” statements on the front of index cards and answers on the back. Or do the same with a hand-held tape recorder. Make recorded questions, pauses for answers, then recorded answers.
- Seven is the magic number. Repeat difficult information seven times a day for seven days, or create seven Index cards with the word or fact written on them. Tape the cards in places where you go frequently (i.e., mirror, fridge, etc), then forget about them. After two weeks you will subliminally absorb the information.
- Reveal: During review cover up the text below headings and try to remember what's next.

- Highlight key ideas in your textbooks and outlines. Give extra attention to words or phrases in bold. Make up acronyms or mnemonics to recall (i.e. GIGO= garbage in; garbage out) or Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally = parentheses first, then exponents, then multiplication, division, addition and subtraction)
- Mapping: Make a mental image of your notes, outlines, charts, etc. and how facts support related topics. These images (fact maps) and their data can often be recalled during tests.