

CHAPTER 5

Notes from the Underground

You should read this chapter if you need to review or learn about



- ➔ Taking notes as direct quotations, summaries, and paraphrases
- ➔ Different note-taking techniques
- ➔ Making useful study outlines

In Chapter 4, you learned all about the seven types of intelligence to determine how you learn best. Now you will find out how to take complete and useful study notes. You will first learn all about copying information verbatim, summarizing, and paraphrasing. Then you will explore different note-taking layouts to find the ones that are best for you.

Get Started



There are different ways to take notes. Discover the formats and structures that work best for each subject, your level of expertise, and your personal learning style.

The Three Big Rules for Great Notes

No one can remember all the material they read or hear during a lecture. That's why you need to take notes. Taking good notes helps you remember what you read and reinforces what you learned. Good notes also serve as a study guide to help you get top grades on tests.

There are three main ways to take notes: *writing direct quotations*, *summarizing*, and *paraphrasing*. Each is explained in detail in this chapter. Regardless of the methods you use, the overall techniques remain the same.

Here are the three basic guidelines.

1. Keep your notes short. If you write too much, you'll be right back where you started—trying to separate essential from nonessential information. Try these methods:
 - Write sentence fragments rather than complete sentences.
 - Use abbreviations to save space and time. For example,
 - + or & = and
 - b/c = because
 - w/ = with
 - Use sketches, charts, and lists to separate the important facts from the minor details.
2. Be sure to mark direct quotes with quotation marks. This can help you distinguish between your own words and the writer's or instructor's words.
3. Check and double-check your notes. Be sure that you have spelled all names correctly and copied dates correctly. Check that you have spelled the easy words correctly, too; many errors creep in because writers overlook the obvious words.

Noting Direct Quotations

A *direct quotation* is word-for-word copying, exactly as the material appears in the source. If there is an error in the source, you even copy that, writing [*sic*] next to the mistake. Show that a note is a direct quotation by surrounding it with quotation marks (“ ”)

What should you quote?

- Quote key points—passages that sum up the main idea in a pithy way.
- Quote subtle ideas. Look for passages whose meaning would be watered down or lost if you summarized or paraphrased them.
- Quote powerful writing. If the passage is memorable or famous, it will give your test paper authority.

Here's a sample to use as a model:



Quick Tip

In general, quote briefly
when you take notes.
Remember that long
quotations are difficult to
remember and memorize.

Topic: *Nez Percé surrender*

"It is cold, and we have no blankets; the little children are freezing to death. My people, some of them, have run away to the hills, and have no blankets, no food. No one knows where they are—perhaps freezing to death. I want to have time to look for my children, to see how many of them I can find. Maybe I shall find them among the dead. Hear me, my chiefs! I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever."

Comments: Very moving, emotional speech. Shows tragic consequences of displacement of Native Americans.

Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History, p. 108.

Summarizing

A *summary* is a smaller version of the original, reducing the passage to its essential meaning. Be sure to summarize carefully to avoid distorting the meaning of the original passage. What should you summarize?

- Background information
- Commentaries
- Explanations
- Evaluations
- A writer's or speaker's line of thinking or argument

When you summarize, write only the key information. Look for the following elements:

- The main idea
- Important names, dates, numbers
- Key details
- Any questions you have about the material

To find the key information, listen or read for word clues, such as *the most important reason*, *the main point*, or *this will be on the test*. Instructors and writers often repeat vital facts in

different ways, so watch for repetition. Pay special attention at the very beginning and end of a lecture, when an instructor often introduces and summarizes the main points. The same is true in a reading. Here's a sample summary to use as a model:

Original

Topic: Clarence Darrow against capital punishment

"Now, why am I opposed to capital punishment? It is too horrible a thing for the state to undertake. We are told by my friend, 'Oh, the killer does it; why shouldn't the state?' I would hate to live in a state that I didn't think was better than a murderer.

But I told you the real reason. The people of a state kill a man because he killed someone else—that is all—without the slightest logic, without the slightest application to life, simply from anger, nothing else!

I am against it because I believe it is inhuman, because I believe that as the hearts of men have softened they have gradually gotten rid of brutal punishment, because I believe it will only be a few years until it will be banished forever from every civilized country—even New York—because I believe that it has no effect whatever to stop murder."

Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History, p. 108.

Summary

Topic: Clarence Darrow against capital punishment

Rage and a desire for retribution are not sufficient justification for capital punishment. It is a cruel, inhuman, and uncivilized form of punishment. Further, capital punishment does nothing to deter crime. For these reasons, he believes capital punishment will soon be eliminated, even in NY.

Comments: Original speech has an ironic, sarcastic tone.

Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History, p. 108.

Paraphrasing

A *paraphrase* is a restatement of the writer's original words. It often includes examples and explanations from the original source. A paraphrase may be longer than the original, shorter than the original, or the same length as the original. You may paraphrase information that is important but too long to write in the original form.

Here's a sample to use as a model:

Original

Topic: Social responsibility (JFK inauguration speech)

"In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from that responsibility—I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the devotion which we

bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it—and the glow from that fire can truly light the world.

And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.”

Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History, p. 811.

Paraphrase

Topic: social responsibility (JFK inauguration speech)

America faces great peril. As a result, America is now faced with the challenge of standing up for liberty. Not many countries have ever been in this position. Kennedy welcomes this challenge because he believes his actions (and America’s valiant response) can stand as a beacon for the rest of the world to follow.

“And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.”

Comments: A very famous and stirring speech. Famous quote.

Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History, p. 811.

How Much Is Enough?

Taking effective notes is a delicate balance between writing too much and writing too little. This isn’t as crucial when it comes to taking notes from a reading, because you can always return to the text and correct any problems with your notes. In these instances, you add what you missed and cross out what you repeated.

However, when it comes to a classroom lecture, it’s important that you get it right the first time because there’s no second act. If the instructor agrees, you can always bring a tape recorder to class and tape the lecture. *Always* get the instructor’s permission before you tape a lecture. I’m not a fan of tape-recording lectures because I find that my students tend to zone out and not pay attention when they’re recording. Then they find it very tedious to listen to the entire lecture again, so they usually don’t. They feel as if they’re doing the same work twice—and they are. That said, if you think taping lectures would be helpful, get permission and go for it. In any event, you are still going to have to take notes.

Following is an example of a lecture on the human skeleton and effective notes on it. Read the margin notes to see the justification for each note.

Lecture

Important numbers As babies we start off with about 300 bones in our skeleton, but some bones join together as we grow. There are 206 separate bones in an adult’s body.

Main idea Have you ever wondered why we need a skeleton? One important reason concerns our muscles and internal organs. They are very soft and need protection. Some organs need more protection than others. For
Key detail instance, our brain and spinal cord are protected by the skull and spine.

<i>Key detail</i>	The heart, liver, lungs, and intestines are all easily damaged, so they are protected by ribs, hip bones, and our spine.
<i>Main idea</i>	Skeletons also help us stand up. Without a skeleton, we would slump into a heap. Our muscles are strong, but without a skeleton we wouldn't have anything to pull against and we would be unable to stand up or move.

Notes

<i>Skeleton</i>	<i>300 bones in child, 206 bones in adult because bones fuse.</i>
	<i>—Protects muscles and internal organs</i>
	<i>—Enables us to stand and move</i>
	<i>—Skull and spine protect brain and spinal cord</i>
	<i>—Ribs, hip bones, and spine protect heart, liver, lungs, intestines</i>

Top Five Note-Taking Techniques

There are different ways that you can take notes. As we have discussed, the method you select depends on the subject, how much you know about it, and your personal style. For example, spatial learners often find it very helpful to take notes as charts, graphs, and other visuals. Try each of the following methods to see which ones work for you.

1. *Divided-page format.* Fold your paper in half vertically to create a narrow column and a wide one. The left column should be about an inch and a half wide; the right column, seven inches wide. Write your notes in the wide right column. Write key words and ideas in the narrow left column. You can add additional material to the narrow left column as you review and study your notes. This method makes it easier to call out important facts and ideas.

2. *Webbing.* As you read a text or listen to a lecture, isolate the key idea. Write it in the middle of a sheet of paper. Add lines radiating out from the circle. At the end of each line, draw a circle and fill it in with a subtopic. Figure 5-1 shows a sample web based on a lecture about the Congressional Medal of Honor.

When you create webs, be sure to leave yourself enough room. Write only key words. Webs are great ways to take notes because they help you to write only the essential information. This makes it much easier to study later.

Quick Tip



The web method of note taking works best with well-written textbooks and speakers whose lectures are well organized. This method won't work as well when the lecturer is poorly organized because it will be much more difficult to find the main idea and supporting details.

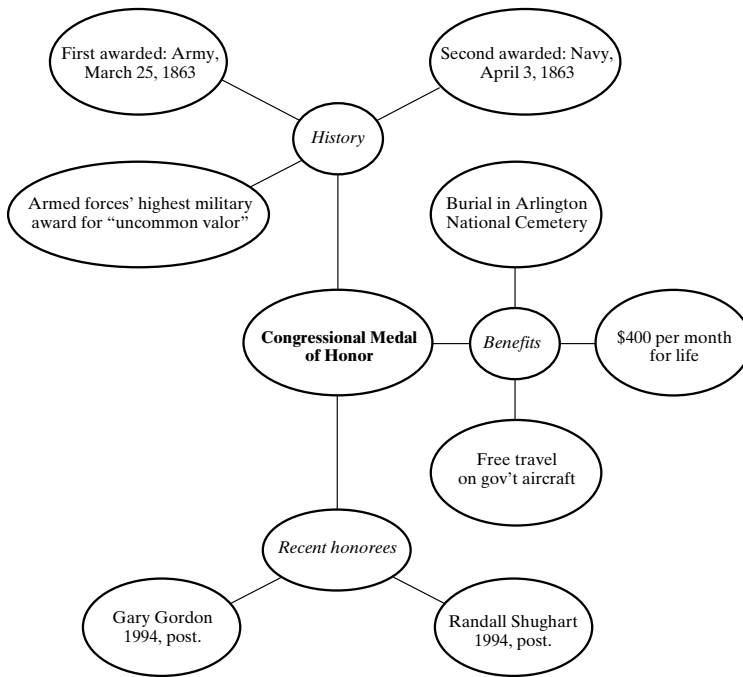


Fig. 5-1 Example of webbing method of note taking.

3. *Visuals.* Webs aren't the only graphic organizers you can use to take notes. Create pictures and diagrams to show the relationship between ideas, as well. Draw any illustrations that help make the process clear. For example, you can use arrows to create a flowchart that illustrates the process of language acquisition, as follows:

Pidgin → pidgin speakers have children → a creole
 (makeshift jargon) (consistent word order, affixes,
 tenses, complex sentence structures)

You might arrange your notes in chart form, as the following chart on the topic of the Congressional Medal of Honor shows:

Subtopics	Details
Significance	Given for actions above and beyond the call of duty in combat
History	Army: March 25, 1863 Navy: April 3, 1863 April 1991: First black soldier honored (Army Cpl. Freddie Stowers)
Benefits	\$400 per month for life Burial in Arlington National Cemetery Free travel on gov't aircraft
Recent honorees	1994: Master Sgt. Gary Gordon 1994: Sgt. 1st Class Randall Shughart

4. *Lists.* If the textbook or instructor is presenting a series of facts that all have the same importance, you may wish to list them. This is a good way of showing that all items have the same rank. For example, you may wish to list the presidents, famous inventors, or a series of math theories. Start each entry with a number or bullet to set it apart from the other entries.

5. *Paragraphs.* When the lecture doesn't have a clear method of organization, consider arranging your notes in paragraph form. Try to write as many fragments (incomplete sentences) as you can to keep the paragraphs easy to read. If the instructor speaks very quickly, you'll be forced to write fragments. However, if the pacing is good, you can include some complete sentences for exact definitions, direct quotations, and especially important points.

Skip lines between paragraphs to indicate the beginning of a new topic. If you get confused or lose the thread of the lecture, leave space in your notes. That way, you can return to the confusing passage and add the information from your reading or from speaking to the instructor after the lecture or during office hours.

These methods can easily be combined. For example, including a list or a visual in the middle of a paragraph can make it easier to take down specific types of information. In a similar way, adding a quick drawing can help you illustrate a key point.

Quick Tip



If you keyboard faster than you handwrite (and many of us do!), consider bringing a laptop to class and using it as you take notes. Of course, you can always keyboard notes you take from a reading. Keyboarding also has the advantage of making your notes easier to read.

Outline and Highlight

Outlining is such a useful method of note taking that it deserves its own discussion. Many students find it especially effective to take notes in outline form because it helps them arrange and categorize information.

When you make an outline, you're not just blankly recording facts; rather, you're actively thinking about the message that you're hearing or reading. Therefore, outlining can be an invaluable way of fixing the information in your mind because it forces you to engage with the content.

After you create the outline, go back over it and highlight the most important information. Here is a general outline format you can use as you take notes.

Title: _____

I. First main idea _____

A. Detail _____

1. Reason or example _____

a. Detail _____

b. Detail _____

2. Reason or example _____

a. Detail _____

b. Detail _____

B. Detail _____

1. Reason or example _____

a. Detail _____

b. Detail _____

2. Reason or example _____

a. Detail _____

b. Detail _____

II. Second main idea _____

A. Detail _____

1. Reason or example _____

a. Detail _____

b. Detail _____

2. Reason or example _____

a. Detail _____

b. Detail _____

B. Detail _____

1. Reason or example _____

a. Detail _____

b. Detail _____

2. Reason or example _____

a. Detail _____

b. Detail _____

Regardless of the note-taking methods you use, consider the following ways to make your notes easier to read:



Quick Tip

**Your notes will be useless
unless you can read them!
Be sure to write or print
clearly.**

- *Use different colors.* Consider setting off important information in a different color. For example, when you are taking notes from a book, you may wish to write all headings in red and the rest of the page in blue or black. This makes the headings stand out.
- *Highlight key sections.* Go back over your notes with a yellow or green highlighter and set off key points. This makes them pop right off the page. Just the act of highlighting helps fix the information in your mind, but when you go back over your notes later, you'll know which information is most important to study. If you find that highlighting works well for you, take notes on only one side of the page, as the highlighter has a tendency to bleed through to the back of the page.
- *Add graphic signals.* Use arrows, stars, and underlining to indicate important points in your notes. You can add these while you're taking notes or during a review session.

Tips for Students with Learning Disabilities

The following suggestions will work for all students, but they are likely to be especially helpful for students who have learning disabilities. If you fall into this category, try each of these techniques to see which ones prove most effective for you.

- When you take notes, divide your paper in half and write "Topics" on left side and "Details" on right side. This helps you categorize and arrange information logically.

Quick Tip



Always copy down everything an instructor writes on the board. If it's on the board, you can assume it's important.

- Use a piece of carbon paper between pages so you always have a second copy of the notes you've taken. Notes have a way of getting misplaced.
- Ask if you can use a tape recorder to record the instructor's lecture. That way, if you find your attention wandering, you will still be able to review the complete material later.
- Create note cards out of index cards. Write a heading and then write details. The small space on note cards helps you limit what you write, forcing you to find the key information.
- Write down all words in bold print on note cards and their definitions. Review several note cards daily to fix the information in your mind.
- Ask your instructors for help when you need it. Don't be a stranger.



It's a Wrap



There are many ways to take good notes. Select the methods that work best for your specific learning styles, the subject matter, and your degree of familiarity with it.



You can take notes by writing down direct quotations, by summarizing, or by paraphrasing.



Try taking notes in the divided-page format, webbing, visuals, lists, paragraphs, and outlines.



Regardless of the note-taking methods you use, use different colors, highlighting, and graphic signals to make your notes easier to read.



QUESTIONS

True-False Questions

1. There is basically only one way to take good notes.
2. People need to take notes because nobody can remember all the material they read or hear during a lecture. Taking notes also helps you focus in on the key information you need.
3. When you take notes, write sentence fragments rather than complete sentences.
4. If you are taking notes and a direct quotation contains an error, correct the error. That way, you will not have an error in your notes.

5. Be sure to summarize carefully so you don't distort the meaning of the original passage.
6. Paraphrase information that is important but too short to write in the original form.
7. Taking effective notes is a delicate balance between writing too much and writing too little.
8. Webs are great ways to take notes because they help you to write only the essential information.
9. When the lecture doesn't have a clear method of organization, consider arranging your notes in web form.
10. If you get confused or lose the thread of the lecture, just keep writing. Do not leave space in your notes.

Completion Questions

1. Good notes also serve as a _____ that helps you get top grades on tests.
2. There are three main ways to take notes: writing direct quotations, summarizing, and _____.
3. Keep your notes _____. If you write too much, you'll be right back where you started—trying to separate essential from the nonessential information.
4. Use _____ to save space and time. For example, use + or & instead of *and*.
5. A _____ is word-for-word copying, exactly as the material appears in the source.
6. A _____ is a smaller version of the original, reducing the passage to its essential meaning.
7. To find the key information, listen or read for _____ such as *the most important reason, the main point, or this will be on the test*.
8. A _____ is a restatement of the writer's original words. It often includes examples and explanations from the original source.
9. The web method of note taking works best with well-written textbooks and speakers whose lectures are _____.
10. Create pictures and diagrams to show the relationship between _____.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Select the note-taking techniques you use based on all the following *except*
 - (a) The subject
 - (b) Your level of expertise in it
 - (c) Your personal learning style
 - (d) What the instructor prefers

2. Quote all of the following information *except*
 - (a) Key points
 - (b) Long passages
 - (c) Subtle ideas
 - (d) Examples of powerful writing
3. When should you pay special attention during a lecture to catch key points?
 - (a) In the beginning
 - (b) In the end
 - (c) In the middle
 - (d) At the beginning and end
4. A paraphrase is always
 - (a) Shorter than the original source
 - (b) Longer than the original source
 - (c) The length that best suits the material
 - (d) The same length as the original source
5. Before you tape record a lecture,
 - (a) You don't have to do anything special
 - (b) Reread the textbook
 - (c) Always get the instructor's permission
 - (d) Speak to a classmate to review the material
6. Visual notes include all the following *except*
 - (a) Pictures
 - (b) Paragraphs
 - (c) Webs
 - (d) Diagrams
7. To show that all items in your notes are the same rank, you should
 - (a) Write them verbatim
 - (b) Directly quote them
 - (c) Write them in a paragraph
 - (d) List them
8. When you make an outline, you are
 - (a) Actively thinking about the information you are hearing or reading
 - (b) Simply recording facts
 - (c) Writing as much as you can
 - (d) Arranging the information from most to least important
9. You can make your notes easier to read by
 - (a) Writing them early in the day

- (b) Writing them quickly
 - (c) Using different colors and highlighting important passages
 - (d) Handwriting them rather than keyboarding them
10. If you have a learning disability,
- (a) Tape-record all lectures rather than trying to take notes
 - (b) Have someone else take notes for you
 - (c) Stick to only one method of note taking
 - (d) Try special techniques to find the ones that work best for you

ANSWER KEY

True-False Questions

1. F 2. T 3. T 4. F 5. T 6. F 7. T 8. T 9. F 10. F

Completion Questions

1. Study guide 2. Paraphrasing 3. Short or brief 4. Abbreviations 5. Direct quotation
6. Summary 7. Word clues 8. Paraphrase 9. Well-organized
10. Ideas

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. a 2. b 3. d 4. c 5. c 6. b 7. d 8. a 9. c 10. d