

The Cornell System for Taking Notes

The First Step—Preparing the System

1. Use a large loose leaf notebook.
 - a. It's large enough for ample room.
 - b. The loose leaf feature enables you to insert hand-outs, etc.
2. Draw a vertical line about 2½ inches from the left edge of each sheet. This is the recall column.
 - a. Record classroom notes in the space to the right of the line.
 - b. Later, write the key words and phrases to the left of the line—in the recall column.

The Second Step—During the Lecture

1. Record your notes in simple dash outline. Your object is to make your notes clear so they will have meaning weeks or months later.
2. Strive to capture general ideas rather than details. You will be better able to follow the train of thought or the development of an idea.
3. Skip lines to show the end of one idea and the start of another. Indicate sub-ideas and supporting details with number or letters under the major idea.
4. Use abbreviations when possible. Don't, however, use so many abbreviations that you can't decipher your notes later.
5. Write legibly. Do your notes right the first time!

The Third Step—After the Lecture

1. Consolidate your notes as soon after the lecture as possible.
 - a. Read through them, making corrections and filling in; finish with a summary.
 - b. Underline or box the words containing the main ideas.
 - c. In the recall column, jot down key words and phrases that will be cues for the ideas and facts on the right (in making your recall phrases, you will have organized and structured the lecture in a meaningful, easy to remember form).
2. Now cover up the right side of the sheet, exposing only the recall column. Using your key words and phrases to help you recall, RECITE aloud the facts or ideas of the lecture as fully as you can. Then uncover the notes and verify what you have said.

In Summary—The 5 R's

1. Record (write) the lecture.
2. Reduce the ideas and facts into the recall column.
3. Recite the main ideas and facts triggered by your recall phrases.
4. Reflect on your understanding of the material.
5. Review your notes periodically.

Adapted from: <http://www.isu.edu/ctl/cls/handouts/NoteTakingStrategies/cornell.pdf>