

The Five Phases of the Focused Note-Taking Process

AVID’s focused note-taking process has five phases. It is important to note that while *applying learning* is the last phase of the process, it is essential that it inform the first phase, as the note-taking format should be shaped by the note-taking purpose. When teaching the focused note-taking process, educators need to determine how students will use their notes and set up the format appropriately. It is crucial for educators to model and invite students to engage in this thought process so that note-taking becomes a powerful and portable learning tool students can carry with them throughout their educational experience.

<p>Taking Notes</p> 	<p>Create the notes. Select a note-taking format, set up the note page, record the Essential Question, and take notes based on an information source (lecture, book, website, article, video, etc.), selecting, paraphrasing, and arranging information in a way that meets your note-taking objective.</p>
<p>Processing Notes</p> 	<p>Think about the notes. Revise notes—by underlining, highlighting, circling, chunking, questioning, adding, deleting—to identify, select, sort, organize, and classify main ideas and details. Evaluate the relative importance of information and ideas in the notes.</p>
<p>Connecting Thinking</p> 	<p>Think beyond the notes. Analyze the notes using inquiry to make connections and deepen content knowledge by asking questions and adding your own thinking to create greater understanding, identify gaps or points of confusion, and connect your new learning to what you already know.</p>
<p>Summarizing and Reflecting on Learning</p> 	<p>Think about the notes as a whole. Pull together the most important aspects of your notes and your thinking about them to craft a summary that captures the meaning and importance of the content and reflects on how the learning helps you meet the note-taking objective.</p>
<p>Applying Learning</p> 	<p>Use the notes. Save and revisit your notes as a resource or learning tool to help you apply or demonstrate what you have learned.</p>

Planning for Note-Taking

Thoughtful preparation on the part of the instructor can ensure student success in the focused note-taking process. Educators can use the following questions prior to beginning a learning experience to clarify students' note-taking needs and provide guidance for them as necessary.

1. What are the overall learning goals for this lesson, activity, assignment, or experience?
2. How will I determine whether a student is successful? What indicators will I use to measure success?
3. Where will note-taking be necessary in this learning experience?
4. What will be the purpose of the notes? How will students use their notes to achieve success?
5. What questions or objectives can I provide the students to let them know how to focus their efforts?
6. What should the students' notes contain? Will all learners have similar notes, or will the content vary?
7. What resources might students use for reference when they revise their notes?
8. What type or format of notes will be most conducive to the note-taking purpose?
9. How much structure will I need to provide in advance for the students' notes?
10. Where are my students likely to encounter difficulty in the learning or the note-taking? What kind of assistance or instruction will I need to provide before or during the process? Is there a digital tool that could support this need?
11. When will feedback be useful to the students in the note-taking process? What kind of feedback will be most beneficial? How will I provide that feedback?



Planning for Note-Taking

Thoughtful preparation on the part of the student can ensure success in the focused note-taking process. Students can use the following questions prior to beginning a learning experience to clarify their note-taking needs and identify opportunities where additional information or guidance might be necessary.

1. What are the overall learning goals for this lesson, assignment, or experience?
2. What does success with this lesson, assignment, or experience look like? How will success be measured?
3. Where is note-taking necessary in this learning experience?
4. What is the purpose of the notes? How will I use my notes to be successful with this lesson, assignment, or experience?
5. What questions or objectives are provided that let me know how to focus my efforts?
6. What information or content should my notes contain?
7. What resources might I reference when revising my notes?
8. What type or format of notes will be most conducive to the note-taking purpose?
9. Where am I likely to encounter difficulty in the learning or the note-taking? What kind of assistance or instruction will I need before or during the process? Is there a digital tool that could support this need?
10. When will feedback be useful in the note-taking process? What kind of feedback will be most beneficial? How will I ask for or receive that feedback?

Cornell Note Template

This resource is for educators to use to teach students how to set up their paper for Cornell notes. Students should be encouraged to set up their own note-taking format rather than use pre-formatted note paper.

Topic:		Name:
Objective/Note-Taking Purpose:		Class/Period:
		Date:
Essential Question:		
Questions/Connections:	Notes:	
<p>Leave this space blank for adding questions and ideas in the Connecting Thinking phase.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">  About 1/3 of the page  </p>	<p>Take notes in this section using whatever method you prefer: outline, webbing, bullets, charts, diagrams, or a combination.</p> <p>Leave space for additions and revisions.</p>	
Summary Reflection:		
<p>Add a space for a summary at the end of your notes. When taking notes on paper, you might want to wait to designate this area on your paper until you finish taking the notes so you do not run out of space for note-taking.</p>		

Two-Column Notes Ideas

Column 1	Column 2
Main Idea	Details
Claim	Evidence
Cause	Effect
Concept	Example
Term	Definition
Hypothesis	Results
Steps (in a process)	What the Step Looks Like (drawing or explanation)
Historical Event	Details
Character (in a story)	Traits
Philosopher's Name	Major Ideas and Works
Question	Answer
Vocabulary Word and Definition	Visual Representation, Sketch, or Example
Math Problem Solved (show work)	Explanation of the Steps to Solve It
Idea	Commentary (pros, cons, considerations)
Person	Accomplishments
Issue	Connection to Self, Another Text, or the World
Component (e.g., part of a cell, branch of government)	Function
Fact/Person/Term/Event/Work	Significance
Example	Non-example

Three-Column Notes Ideas

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
First Source	Second Source	Connections
Differences of First Idea	Similarities	Differences of Second Idea
Vocabulary Term	Definition/Explanation	Visual or Sentence
Know	Want to Know	Learned
Description	Information	Importance
Something Being Observed	Observations	Conclusions
Name	Characteristics	Real-World Examples
Questions	Book Notes	Class Notes
Topic	First Source	Second Source
Cause	Effect	Importance
Pre-Reading Thoughts	Reading Notes	Post-Reading Thoughts
Person	Accomplishments	Challenges
Concept	Advantages	Disadvantages
Artwork and Artist	What the Book Says About It	Thoughts and Observations
Title	Summary	Themes
Claim	Evidence	Reasoning

Best Practices for Taking Notes (Grades 4–6)

An important success skill that all students should know is how to take good notes. Just like playing a sport or an instrument, being able to take good notes requires practice. Since notes can be taken while listening to a lecture, reading a piece of text, or watching a video, it's important to know how to take notes from each type of source. Don't expect your notes to be perfect the first time, but if you keep a few tips in mind, you will soon see your note-taking skills improving.

To start, it's important to understand why you are taking notes. When you understand why you're taking notes, you will have a better idea of what information you need to write down, and what you can leave out.

Don't worry about your notes looking perfect. You will be adding new ideas, scratching out mistakes, and creating connections in the margins. Although your notes don't have to be perfect, they should be legible. If you (or your teacher) can't read your own notes, they won't help you out much.

Also, when taking notes from a text, resist copying everything word-for-word. It's important to read the information, think about what it says and means, and then shorten the most valuable parts using your own words. Think and shrink! If you're worried that your interpretation of the text is incorrect, you can always cite where to find the text in your notes and revisit it to double-check.

On the topic of shrinking things, another note-taking shortcut is to use abbreviations when you can. Most good notes rarely contain complete sentences. Using abbreviations, symbols, tiny drawings, shapes, and arrows shorten the amount you have to write without changing the information. It's like text messaging on paper!

Additionally, when organizing your notes, don't overcrowd your space. Skip lines between main ideas and leave plenty of room on the page to add information later. If you don't, you'll have two problems: 1) you won't be able to tell where one idea ends and another begins, and 2) you won't be able to add additional notes or questions as you study.

How do you know if information is important enough to write down? Look (and listen) for phrases like "the most important" or superlative adjectives such as *best*, *biggest*, *most*, *least*, *worst*, and *main*. These words and phrases are red flags signaling valuable information you should probably add to your notes. If a speaker slows down, repeats something, spells out a word, or writes something on the board, pay attention and write it down. If a word or phrase is **bold**, *italicized*, or underlined, the writer meant for it to jump off the page for the reader to notice. Read the text surrounding that word carefully.

Taking good notes is a skill that takes time and practice to master. Just like riding a bike, it might be a bit bumpy in the beginning, but if you keep trying, you'll get the hang of it. And remember, taking good notes is a skill that will make you more college- and career-ready!

Best Practices for Taking Notes (Secondary)

Taking notes over a lecture, a piece of text, or a video is a task you will be asked to perform throughout your life as a student, so there's no better time to start developing and improving those note-taking skills than right now. Effective note-taking requires practice. Don't expect to be skilled at it immediately. By keeping a few pointers in mind, however, you will soon see your note-taking abilities improving, and you will be one step further on the road to student success.

One of the most important things to remember when you are taking notes is to keep your purpose in mind. When you understand why you're taking the notes, you have a better idea of what you need to have in your notes and what is okay to leave out. Listen or read carefully, and engage your brain to sift out the information and ideas that will be most useful to you.

Your notes are a work in process, not a finished product. Therefore, they shouldn't look perfect because you will be adding to them, scratching things out, correcting mistakes, supplying clarifying details, and using them as an active tool for learning. Even though your notes needn't be perfect, they should be legible. If you can't read your own notes, they won't help you out much.

Research by Marzano, Pickering, and Pollack (2008) indicated that taking more notes is better than taking few notes. Therefore, make your notes as complete as possible, but resist the temptation to copy down every word from your source. Verbatim, or word-for-word, notes are the least useful type of notes. It's a better idea to phrase things using your own words. Your brain should act like a big coffee filter. All the information from the source goes into your brain, but only the worthwhile stuff makes its way into your notes—and it doesn't look exactly the same as before your brain filtered it. Think about the information and shrink it into something more compact. Think and shrink! Be mindful of this when you are typing notes on a computer. Since most people type more quickly than they write by hand, it's much easier to type your notes verbatim from the source. Resist the urge to transcribe everything.

While you're shrinking things, shrink the length of what you write. Great notes seldom contain complete sentences; words and phrases are generally better. Use abbreviations, symbols, tiny drawings, shapes, arrows, and whatever else you find useful in order to keep the meaning while shortening the amount you have to write down (and the amount you have to reread later). Leaving out vowels or chopping off the ends of words can make your note-taking more efficient. *Whn u use thse abb., the msg is still clr, yes?*

The one exception to the rule that less is more occurs when you are taking notes that you plan to use for a piece of writing or another product where you might want to quote a source directly. If you find a particularly powerful quotation or a sentence or two that is worded so effectively that you want to keep the original wording intact, copy the text down verbatim in your notes. Make sure that you put quotation marks around the words you copy so that you can give the author credit when you use those words in your product. Also, it's a good idea to keep track of where the source came from, the author or speaker's name, and the page number, if available, so you can cite the sources of your research.

Look and listen for clues to help you determine what information is most important. Phrases such as “the most important” or “the key feature” and superlative words such as *best*, *biggest*, *most*, *least*, and *main* are red flags signaling information you probably want to have in your notes. Similarly, when the speaker slows down, repeats something, spells out a word, or writes on the board, pay attention and write it down. Textbooks and informational texts sometimes put important terms or items in bold; include those boldface or highlighted words in your notes, perhaps underlining them to show they are important. A phrase like “One reason...” or “The first...” might tip you off that a list is about to begin.

As you’re taking notes, think about how the information is organized. What are the main points? What are the supporting details? How does it all fit together? Try to make the arrangement of ideas on your note page reflect the organizational pattern. Some note-takers like to use an outline format or bullets, with big ideas closer to the left margins and less-important details indented. Others create mind maps or webs with big ideas in the center and smaller ideas on the arms that reach outward. Skip lines between main ideas, and leave plenty of room on the page to add information later. If your initial notes are one crowded mass of words, you’ll have two problems: 1) you won’t be able to tell what the main ideas are, and 2) you won’t be able to add additional notes or questions as you study.

Finally, a splash of color can make it easier to find information in your notes later. Consider using a different pen color for important names, terms, or other key information. Perhaps you would find it useful to change pen colors each time your notes move to a new concept or section. Be careful, though, that your color-coding doesn’t distract from the most important task, which is paying attention to the information and trying to get the key ideas into your notes in a clear and retrievable manner.

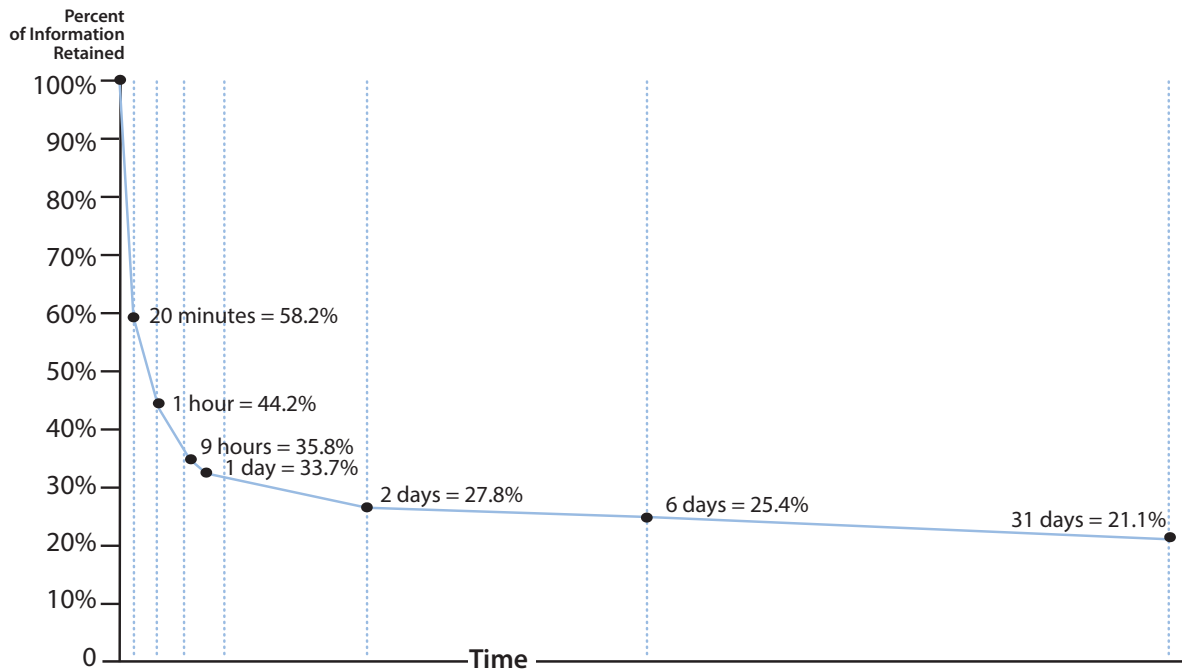
Note-taking is a life skill that takes a lifetime to master. We can all continue to practice and improve the ways we take notes. In time, the process gets easier and more efficient. Keep working at it, and soon you will be enjoying the benefits of taking notes that help you work and learn more effectively in and out of school.

Common Note-Taking Abbreviations and Symbols

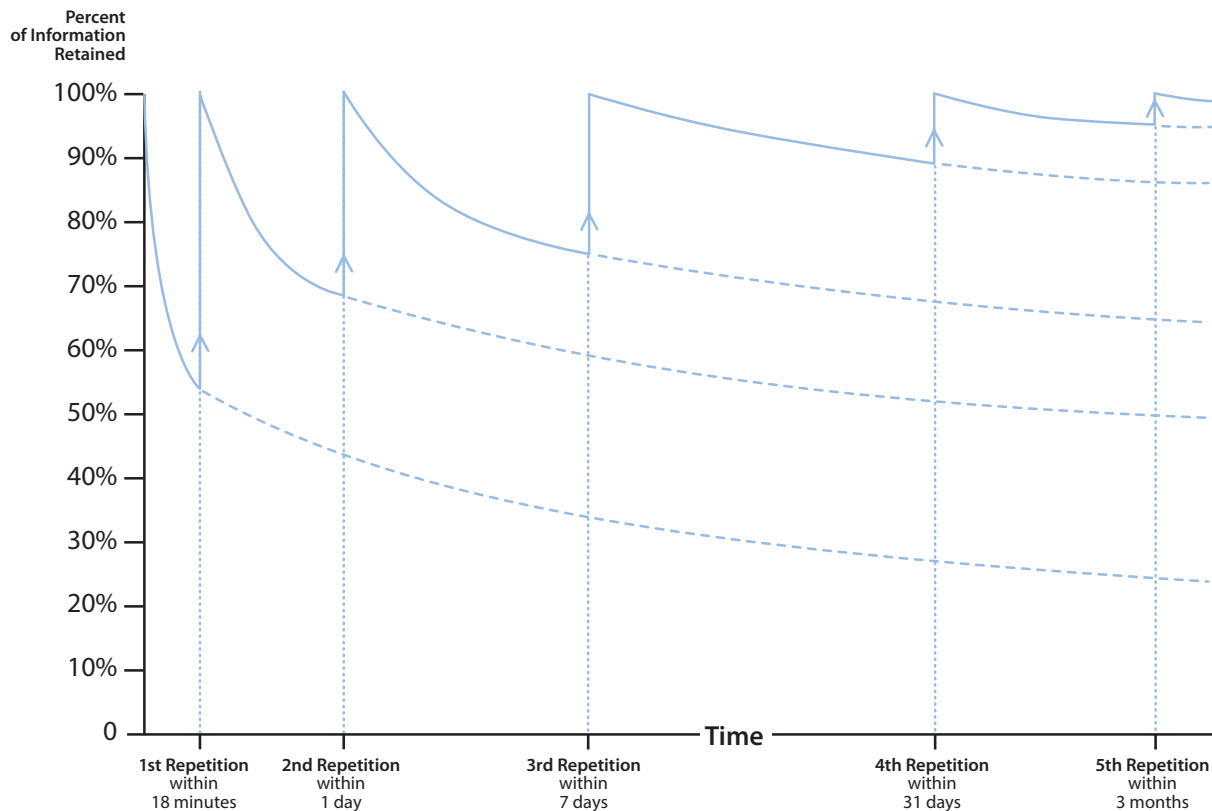
Instead of writing...	Consider using this shortcut...
against	vs.
and	& / +
and so on	etc.
approximately, around	c. / approx.
at	@
bad	X / ☹
because	bc
causes, leads to, produces	→
century	C
decrease, fall, decline	↓
ditto (same as above)	“ ”
equals, same as, means	=
not equal to, not the same	≠
example	ex. / e.g.
foot/feet	ft.
good	✓ / ☺
important	impt / *
increase, rise, growth	↑
in other words, that is	i.e.
interesting	!
is less than, less	<
is more than, more	>
man, men, male	♂
woman, women, female	♀
maximum	max
minimum	min
money	\$
negative	-
number	#
people	ppl.
per (3 weeks per year)	/
positive	+
question	Q
answer	A
uncertain, possibly	?
square	sq.
therefore	∴
very	v.
extremely	vv.
with	w/
without	w/o
yard(s)	yd.

The Rate of Forgetting

Rate of Forgetting Without Study/Repetition

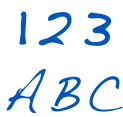








Rate of Forgetting With Study/Repetition



Ebbinghaus, H. (1885). *Memory: A contribution to experimental psychology*. New York, NY: Dover.

Note Revision Checklist

Completed	Symbol	Revision
<input type="checkbox"/>		1. Number the notes for each new concept or main idea.
<input type="checkbox"/>		2. Circle vocabulary/key terms.
<input type="checkbox"/>		3. Highlight or underline main ideas.
<input type="checkbox"/>		4. Fill in gaps of missing information and/or reword/rephrase in red.
<input type="checkbox"/>		5. Delete/cross out unimportant information by drawing a line through it with a red pen.
<input type="checkbox"/>		6. Identify points of confusion to clarify by asking a partner or teacher.
<input type="checkbox"/>		7. Identify information to be used on a test, essay, for a tutorial, etc.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Visual/Symbol	8. Create a visual/symbol to represent important information to be remembered.

Note Revision Checklist Template

For developing note-takers, provide one or two revision expectations at the beginning of the year, and slowly add more as students gain understanding and independence around the process of revising notes.

Completed	Symbol	Revision
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		

How to Create a Summary Reflection

Follow these steps to write a reflective summary at the end of your notes:

Identify the important ideas.

- Revisit your notes, paying attention to the layers you have added during the note-taking process—additions, text markings, questions, etc.
- Focus on each chunk of your notes:
 - What is the big idea of each chunk?
 - Which vocabulary is essential to your overall understanding of this content? Mark those words, or consider making a word bank containing the words you want to use in your summary.
- Think about how the chunks fit together.
 - What is the big-picture structure of the notes? How do the chunks of content relate to one another?
 - What phrases or vocabulary show the relationships between the ideas in your notes? Generate a list of these words (which may not be ones already in your notes), such as *opposes*, *supports*, *justifies*, *proves*, *concludes*, etc.
- Think about what belongs in your summary and what does not.
 - Your summary should be less specific than your notes, but not so vague that it leaves out the important big ideas.

Write your summary.

- Review the Essential Question that guided your note-taking. Your summary should be an answer to that question.
- Your summary should be written in complete sentences. You will probably have one sentence for each chunk of your notes, but that may vary depending on the content and organization of your notes.
- Capture the big ideas and the essential details to create a big picture of the content. Use the most important words and phrases from your word bank.
- Make sure your summary explains the content, not just the format.
- Your summary might begin with a sentence that communicates the overarching idea of the entire note page.

Add a reflection.

- Review the note-taking purpose. Consider why you took the notes and how you will need to use what you learned in the notes.
- At the end of your summary, add a reflection that expresses how these notes will be useful to you or what your future steps should be concerning the content in these notes.
- Remember that the reflection is for you. This is your chance to make your learning meaningful, to remind yourself of the thinking you have been doing, to consider how this learning impacts you, and to personalize your learning.
- Do not merely write that your notes will be useful; explain *how* they will be useful.

Examples of Summary Reflections

Good Summary Reflections

Example 1: The three types of rocks differ in the ways they were formed. Igneous rocks are formed from crystals that developed from the exothermic process of the cooling of magma. Sedimentary rocks are formed as small pieces of broken-off rock (clasts) or organic matter, such as shells and bones, settle in layers and are compacted. Metamorphic rocks change form as the materials that form one kind of rock become unstable and change in an effort to restore equilibrium. Careful examination of the appearance and materials of rocks I observe in the lab will help me determine how the rocks were formed, which gives me an idea of the rock's type.

Example 2: In classical Greece, performances of tragedies were public events involving all members of the polis. The original Greek tragedies were performed in a competition among playwrights at the Festival of Dionysus. The most important tragic playwrights were Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Rules for tragedies were defined by the philosopher Aristotle in the *Poetics*. Plays begin in *medias res* (in the middle of things) and observe the unities of time, place, and action. Understanding the contributions of the playwrights and the rules for tragic plays will help my group as we compose our Greek-style tragedies. We need to study how they made their plays so thrilling without showing violence on stage or having multiple locations.

Example 3: In the article, Gina Barreca defends her belief that English majors are ready to do any job they want after graduating from college. Many parents fear that degrees in the humanities are useless and that English is something anyone can do. Barreca says that English majors are prepared for understanding our complex world, for sniffing out misinformation, for making complex arguments, and for preserving our shared culture. Also, English majors harness the power of words, so they can perceive more deeply and communicate more powerfully—the marks of any effective leader. This article was short on facts, and Barreca (an English professor) has a clear bias, but it will be a worthwhile source for my essay on the importance of the humanities. I will want to find additional resources that give more concrete evidence to support my position.

Example 4: You can't add fractions if the denominator (the number on the bottom) is not the same in all the fractions you are adding. Once you have made a common denominator for all the fractions, you simply add the numerators (the numbers on top) together. At the end, you have to check to see if you need to simplify the fraction. This process is not very difficult as long as I remember the thing about the common denominators and don't just add the top and the bottom across.

Weak Summary Reflection

This chapter talks about the Mongol Empire of Chinggis Khan. It tells about the life of Chinggis Khan and how he came to power. Then, it explains how the empire developed and what life was like under his rule. Finally, the chapter tells about his death and how the empire got divided. This was interesting information that will be very useful for me in my life.

Consider: What makes the above example less useful and effective than the preceding examples?

Focused Note-Taking Reflection Tool for Educators

0 No Focused Note-Taking	1 Educator-Modeled	3 Guided Practice (Educator/Student Collaboration)	5 Independent Practice (Educator-Facilitated/Independent Learner)
TAKING NOTES: FORMAT AND CONTENT			
<p>Instructor does not require students to take notes or does not plan for or require a specific note-taking format.</p>	<p>Instructor plans, selects, and models note-taking format for students.</p> <p>Instructor provides students with content for note-taking or provides fill-in-the-blank note-taking format.</p>	<p>Instructor collaborates with students for input on note-taking format and content.</p> <p>Instructor scaffolds note-taking process through modeling, asking questions, and providing opportunities for student-to-student interaction.</p>	<p>Instructor <i>monitors</i> student design of note-taking format.</p> <p>Instructor <i>monitors</i> student note-taking content.</p>
<p>Students do not take notes, or notes have no intentional format.</p>	<p>Students take notes in the format directed by the instructor.</p> <p>Students copy instructor-provided notes word for word.</p>	<p>Students collaborate with instructor for note-taking format.</p> <p>Students begin to paraphrase and organize notes with support and guidance from the instructor and/or peers.</p>	<p>Most students independently:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. select note-taking format and 2. set up notes, sometimes working collaboratively with peers. <p>Most students independently:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. take notes, 2. paraphrase content, and/or 3. use <i>hierarchy-based organization</i>.
OBSERVATION NOTES			

Monitoring occurs as the teacher moves through the classroom, actively checking for appropriate note page formats based on the purpose of the note-taking. The teacher asks questions while monitoring to push students in their thinking regarding format and usability of notes.

In *hierarchy-based organization*, students use bullet points, arrows, starring, spacing between ideas, or other organizational structures or visual aids to demonstrate how similar content is chunked together for the sake of referring to it when needed. This can also include starring, highlighting, circling, or underlining key ideas in the notes.

0 No Focused Note-Taking	1 Educator- Modeled	3 Guided Practice (Educator/ Student Collaboration)	5 Independent Practice (Educator- Facilitated/ Independent Learner)
PROCESSING NOTES			
Instructor does not provide opportunities for students to revise their notes.	Instructor models strategies for note revision.	Instructor guides and supports students in their interactions with notes through use of additions, revisions, and/or clarifications.	Instructor provides <i>opportunities</i> (time) for students to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. interact with their notes, add to or modify notes, and/or 2. exchange ideas about format and/or content with peers. Instructor monitors progress.
Students do not interact with focused notes.	Students interact with notes as modeled by the instructor.	Students work with instructors and peers to add to, revise, and clarify notes under the guidance of the instructor.	Working independently, most students add to notes through one or more of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. highlighting or underlining important points, 2. identifying main ideas, and/or 3. using symbols or pictures to enhance the content.
OBSERVATION NOTES			

The instructor plans for and embeds structured segments into class time so students have *opportunities* to either work independently or work with a partner or small group.

<p>0 No Focused Note-Taking</p>	<p>1 Educator- Modeled</p>	<p>3 Guided Practice (Educator/ Student Collaboration)</p>	<p>5 Independent Practice (Educator- Facilitated/ Independent Learner)</p>
<p>CONNECTING THINKING</p>			
<p>Instructor does not provide opportunities to make connections.</p>	<p>Instructor models making connections to content for the class by providing questions and giving examples.</p>	<p>Instructor prompts students to make connections with opportunities for writing “I wonder...” questions, thinking about the notes at a level beyond simple comprehension, and adding original thinking to notes.</p>	<p>Instructor provides <i>opportunities</i> (time) for students to use their notes to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. exchange ideas, 2. discuss student-generated questions, and 3. link learning beyond the notes themselves.
<p>Students do not revisit notes to write questions or make connections.</p>	<p>Students interact with notes as directed by the instructor.</p>	<p>Students work with instructor to write higher-level wonderment questions and add original connections.</p>	<p>Most students interact with notes through one or more of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. layering 2. making connections, and/or 3. adding thoughtful questions unprompted by the instructor.
<p>OBSERVATION NOTES</p>			

0 No Focused Note-Taking	1 Educator- Modeled	3 Guided Practice (Educator/ Student Collaboration)	5 Independent Practice (Educator- Facilitated/ Independent Learner)
SUMMARIZING AND REFLECTING ON LEARNING			
Instructor does not ask students to summarize their notes.	Instructor models reviewing notes, writes a summary for the class, and reflects on the usefulness of the learning.	Instructor guides students to draft summaries through a thoughtful review of their notes and to reflect on the usefulness of their new learning.	Instructor provides opportunities for students to summarize and reflect on their new learning.
Students do not write summaries or reflect on their learning.	Students review notes and write a summary reflection along with the instructor.	Students draft summaries including key concepts and terms and reflect on the usefulness of their new learning, under the guidance of the instructor.	Most students independently write summaries: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. including key concepts and terms and 2. reflecting on their new learning.
OBSERVATION NOTES			

0 No Focused Note-Taking	1 Educator- Modeled	3 Guided Practice (Educator/ Student Collaboration)	5 Independent Practice (Educator- Facilitated/ Independent Learner)
APPLYING LEARNING			
Instructor does not provide a purpose for note-taking.	Instructor: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. walks students through the purpose for note-taking and 2. models reviewing of the notes for the class. 	Instructor guides students in: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. evaluating the effectiveness of their notes related to meeting their note-taking purposes and 2. modifying their strategies to improve. 	Instructor provides opportunities for students to independently: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. evaluate the effectiveness of their notes to meet their note-taking purposes and 2. modify their strategies to improve.
Students are asked to write notes for the sake of writing notes, not for use as a learning tool.	Students observe the modeling being done by the instructor and follow the instructor's directions to use their notes for the specified purpose determined by the instructor.	Students work with the instructor and a partner or small group to utilize their notes for studying or other specified purposes.	Students successfully use their notes to demonstrate their learning in different ways for a <i>variety of purposes</i> .
OBSERVATION NOTES			

... *Purposes for note-taking* can include a test or quiz, writing assignment, research project, collaborative group work, jigsaw, Socratic Seminar, Philosophical Chairs, class discussion, or any other opportunity for students to show what they have learned.

Focused Note-Taking Reflection Tool (Elementary)

Phase	Newbie	Developing Skills	Like a Pro
Taking Notes	<p>Set-up: I have to follow my teacher's example notes.</p> <p>Taking: I copy information from the book or speaker, using the same words.</p> <p>Adding: I don't really think about how my notes look on the page.</p>	<p>Set-up: I can set up my notes on my own if I know what format to use.</p> <p>Taking: I shorten information from the book or speaker, and use some of my own words.</p> <p>Adding: I try to leave breaks and space between sections of my notes.</p>	<p>Set-up: When given an option to choose, I can select a format that helps me learn and remember information best.</p> <p>Taking: I use abbreviations and symbols combined with my own words to create the shortest notes possible without losing the meaning.</p> <p>Adding: A person looking at my notes could see how the ideas are organized. I leave plenty of room for later additions.</p>
Processing Notes	<p>Reviewing: I underline, highlight, or circle words without really thinking about it. I don't really study my notes.</p>	<p>Reviewing: I revisit my notes once to mark main ideas, clarify, layer and add information, or chunk information.</p>	<p>Reviewing: I revisit my notes often to add new information or clarify new understandings. Each visit adds a layer of understanding.</p>
Connecting Thinking	<p>Thinking: If I write a question in my notes, it's a question I already know the answer to, or know where to find the answer.</p>	<p>Thinking: I write questions about parts of my notes I don't understand, or want to know more about.</p>	<p>Thinking: I combine my curiosity, prior knowledge, and information from my notes to write many questions that I am eager to find the answers to, and to share my learning with others.</p>
Summarizing and Reflecting on Learning	<p>Summarizing: I rarely write a summary of my notes. I don't really know how to, or why I would.</p>	<p>Summarizing: I know a summary needs to have the main idea of my notes. The main idea should answer the Essential Question or learning target.</p>	<p>Summarizing: Writing a summary allows me to think about the most important parts of my learning, and to paraphrase it into my own words. Rereading my summaries helps me study and remember information.</p>
Applying Learning	<p>Applying: I sometimes use my notes to help work on other projects, but not often.</p>	<p>Applying: My notes are a useful study tool. They help me when I get stuck or when I need to study for a test.</p>	<p>Applying: Using my own notes is what makes me a successful student. I can use my notes in many different ways to become a better student.</p>

Focused Note-Taking Reflection Tool (Secondary)

Phase	Newbie	Developing Skills	Like a Pro
Taking Notes	<p>I can follow the format for my notes if my teacher shows it to me.</p> <p>My notes contain complete sentences, and I often copy or use the same words as the speaker or text.</p> <p>I don't really think about how my notes look on the page.</p>	<p>I know how to use several formats of notes but pretty much stick to the same one unless my teacher tells me what to do.</p> <p>My notes are shorter than the original. I use some abbreviations and try to write in phrases rather than sentences.</p> <p>I try to follow an organizational pattern and leave breaks between sections of my notes.</p>	<p>I consider the purpose for my notes and select the best format based on what I will use the notes for.</p> <p>I'm always thinking about how to get the ideas into my notes in the shortest way possible while keeping the original meaning.</p> <p>A person looking at my notes could see how the ideas are organized and distinguish the main ideas from the details. I leave plenty of room for later additions.</p>
Processing Notes	<p>If my teacher tells me to revise my notes, I underline, highlight, or circle words without much thought. Otherwise, I rarely go back to my notes until I have to study or use them.</p>	<p>I revisit my notes once after taking them to mark main ideas, clarify, add information, and divide them into chunks.</p>	<p>I realize my notes are a work in progress and routinely revisit them to make them as clear and complete as possible. Each new encounter with my notes adds a layer of written interaction.</p>
Connecting Thinking	<p>The answers to questions I write on my notes can usually be found in the notes. I don't spend much time thinking about how the information in my notes relates to me or to ideas outside my notes.</p>	<p>I write questions in my notes that help me understand the content and think about it more deeply. I add my thoughts about how the ideas in my notes relate to me, to other learning, and to the wider world.</p>	<p>The questions I write about the content are ones I would enjoy discussing intellectually with others to get a deeper grasp on the topic. I try to make as many connections outside the notes as possible to link my learning to a bigger picture.</p>
Summarizing and Reflecting on Learning	<p>I wouldn't summarize my notes if I didn't have to. I don't find that it helps me understand what I've studied. I sometimes make general reflections at the end of my summary.</p>	<p>I write a clear summary that captures the main ideas of the notes. I include a reflection at the end to show how my notes will help me reach my learning objective.</p>	<p>Writing my summary provides me with another opportunity to review my notes, this time to capture the most important ideas to make sure I understand the big picture. I include several sentences of thoughtful reflection because I know that reflection makes learning meaningful.</p>
Applying Learning	<p>I sometimes find my notes to be useful in studying or in doing things to show what I have learned.</p>	<p>My notes help me to be successful on assessments and learning experiences that require me to demonstrate my learning. They are a useful study tool.</p>	<p>My notes—with their layers of interaction—are the key to my success in applying what I have learned to a new situation. The process of note-taking has increased my long-term understanding, and I can apply my learning in whatever ways I am asked.</p>

20 Questions: A Note-Taking Self-Quiz (Elementary)

Answer the following questions about how you take notes when reading from a textbook or other written source (like an article). Choose “yes” or “no” based on what you are most likely to do while reading and taking notes.

While Reading:

1. Do you read in a quiet place, free from television, computers, or other distractions?	yes	no
2. Do you look ahead through the text to see how it is organized (headings and subheadings)?	yes	no
3. Do you label your columns in a way that helps you focus on information you are reading to find?	yes	no
4. Do you think about what you’re reading while you’re reading it?	yes	no
5. Do you leave extra lines between main ideas so you can add more information later?	yes	no
6. Do you use abbreviations or symbols as shortcuts?	yes	no
7. Do you shorten sentences from the text into main ideas or your own words?	yes	no
8. Do you use headings from the text to help organize your notes?	yes	no
9. Can another person read your notes?	yes	no
10. Do you separate your main ideas from the details?	yes	no
11. Are your notes free from unimportant details?	yes	no
12. Do you read for signal words (“the most important reason...,” “another cause...,” “however...,”) to find important details to add to your notes?	yes	no
13. Do you add sketches or charts to help you understand vocabulary or concepts better?	yes	no
14. Do you add color to help organize, highlight, or layer information?	yes	no
15. Do you include graphic organizers in your notes to help organize your thinking?	yes	no
16. Do you review your notes?	yes	no
17. Do you change and revise your notes, if needed?	yes	no
18. Can you create questions about topics or concepts you don’t understand?	yes	no
19. Can you create questions to record what you hope to learn more about?	yes	no
20. Can you write a summary of your notes that answers the Essential Question?	yes	no

Count how many “yes” answers you recorded.

- 0–5 = Emerging or Beginning Note-Taker
- 6–10 = Developing Note-Taker
- 11–15 = Proficient Note-Taker
- 16–20 = Distinguished Note-Taker

Making a “Yet” Mindset Plan:

Review the questions that you answered with a “no.” Highlight or star one, two, or three of those questions that represent skills you would like to improve on during this school year. You may choose to include those skills as part of your short-term and/or long-term goals (weekly, trimester/semester, or yearly goals). Record these goals in your planner or another location where you will see them often. Remember, if you are not where you would like to be on the note-taking chart, you just aren’t there yet. Keep practicing, and your note-taking skills will improve! (McKinney, 2017).

20 Questions: A Note-Taking Self-Quiz (Secondary)

Answer the following questions about your reading and note-taking from a textbook. The “best practice” answer for each question is “yes.” If you’re struggling with note-taking and studying, consider ways you might change some of your “no” answers to “yes.”

While Reading:

1. Do you preview the chapter before reading to get an overview of how the author has organized the text?
2. Do you read in an environment that is free of distractions (no television, music, text messages, computer interruptions, etc.)?
3. Do you think while you read? (You should be actively working to construct meaning and understand as you read.)
4. When taking notes on paper, do you leave white space in your notes so you can add more information or make connections later?
5. Do you abbreviate whenever possible?
6. Do you avoid writing complete sentences in your notes, focusing instead on phrases, words, or pictures?
7. Do your notes reflect the organization of the chapter? Do you write the names of sections?
8. Can a person looking at your notes distinguish main ideas from supporting details?
9. Do you try to see the big ideas in the reading? Are you thinking about how the author organized the chapter, why the author included specific information, how ideas compare and contrast, etc.?
10. Are you categorizing the information or grouping the information by theme (e.g., social, political, economic; causes, effects) as you read?
11. Are you avoiding minutia (tiny details or trivia like dates and statistics)?
12. Do you look for cues in the text (“the most important reason...”, “another cause...”, “three goals...”)?
13. Do you put information in a chart, picture, or diagram when it is useful to do so?
14. Are you thinking about your notes as a reminder of what you learned in your reading rather than as a storage place for information you didn’t take the time to put in your brain?
15. Do you think about why people, events, examples, etc. are important?
16. Are your notes legible?

After Reading (*steps that lead to long-term learning*):

17. Do you review and revise your notes after taking them (preferably before class)? Are you underlining or highlighting key terms? Putting stars by important ideas? Color-coding your notes?
18. Do you write higher-level questions about your notes after reviewing and revising them?
19. Do you summarize the notes as a whole after writing questions?
20. Can you use your notes to retell the story or overview of the chapter?

Note-Taking Reflection

Answering these questions will help you get a sense of how well your note-taking skills are progressing and allow you to create goals for future improvement.

1. How does the purpose for your note-taking influence the way you take notes and how you use the notes you take?

2. How useful are your notes in each of the following areas?

	What's useful?	What needs work?
Appearance		
Organization		
Content		
Success in achieving the note-taking purpose		

3. In what ways did your layers of interactions with your notes deepen your understanding of the content?

4. What could you do to make your notes a more useful tool for learning? How will you make that happen?

Strategies for Studying

Effective Studying	Ineffective Studying
Active	Passive
Explaining the notes aloud in your own words	“Going over” or “reading over” the notes
Visiting the content in as many ways as possible—visually, auditorily, conversationally, kinesthetically	Using only one modality of learning, probably visual
Thinking about the type of assessment you are taking and adjusting your studying accordingly	Studying the same way for every type of assessment
Generating mnemonics (songs, rhymes, acronyms, silly or unusual ways to remember)	Looking over content without intentionally trying to commit it to memory
Targeting the information you don’t know or know the least	Studying all the notes or content in their entirety
Creating questions and answering or discussing them	Letting the notes speak for themselves
Revisiting material over time in spaced intervals	Cramming or having a marathon study session
Coming up with examples and making the learning relevant to your experience	Only trying to learn the facts or the wording from your notes
Categorizing, grouping, manipulating, dissecting, or reorganizing the information	Leaving the information in its original form or order
Practicing retrieving content in the notes from your memory or self-quizzing by covering up the notes and reciting them	Assuming the information is stored in your brain without checking to make sure
Prioritizing content by separating main ideas from smaller details	Treating every bit of information as if it has the same importance
Diagnosing what you understand versus what you don’t understand and figuring out how to understand the things you don’t understand	Treating all the content equally
Explaining the content aloud to yourself or another person	Reading through the notes in your head without ever attempting to explain them yourself
Asking a friend or educator to explain things that are unclear	Not asking for help
Concentrating on the meaning of your notes	Regurgitating the material in your notes without thinking about what it means
Focusing on the long-term, thinking about how you can understand the content beyond the day of the test	Storing the content temporarily in your short-term memory