Taking Notes

It’s important to realize that there is not one correct way to take notes. What might work for one student, might confuse another. It could take some exploration, but finding a method that works best for you is one of the most important steps in taking good notes. Here are the 3 parts of note-taking that can prove helpful when putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard.

Part One—Before Class

- **Complete the Required Reading.** It is important that you complete any assigned reading prior to going to class. The reading provides a foundation for lecture that your professor hopes to build on.
  - Take notes as you read, paying close attention and jot down main ideas and themes.
  - Be sure to also formulate questions as you read. Write them down in your notebook or the margin of your book.

- **Be Prepared.** Show up to class on time with plenty of pens, pencils, paper, and anything else you require.

Part Two—During Class

- **Choose Your Spot.** Be selective on where you sit in class. You will be more engaged and take better notes if you sit toward the front of the class.

- **Major Themes.** Don’t write down everything that is said in lecture. Instead focus on writing down the main concepts and filling in supportive information.

- **Find the Cues.** It’s common to have a difficult time picking out the most important topics in lecture. Actively listen and try to pick up on the professor’s cues. Some professors might repeat important information twice, like a date or place. Others might say something like “And now remember…” or “I can’t stress enough…”

- **Title & Date.** Remember to both title and date your notes. This keeps notes organized and easier to locate for studying.

Part Three—After Class

- **Summarize.** Make sure you summarize the information in your own words. This helps you engage and retain the information better.

- **Rework Your Notes.** One of the best ways to review the material in a class is to rewrite or type-up your notes. Not only are you reviewing, but making better study guides come test or quiz time.

- **Fill In the Gaps.** Reworking your notes helps you identify where your notes have gaps. Fill in the gaps by referencing your book or asking questions.

- **Color Code & Short Hand.** Use colors or symbols if they make a meaningful connection to the material.