

The Cornell Note-Taking System

Forty years ago, Walter Pauk (1989) developed what is known as the **Cornell notetaking technique** to help Cornell University students better organize their notes. Today, Pauk's notetaking technique is probably the most widely used system throughout the United States.

Pauk outlines six steps in the Cornell notetaking system:

Record

Reduce (or question)

Recite

Reflect

Review

Recapitulate

Sample

Record

Simply record as many facts and ideas as you can in the six-inch column. Do not be concerned with getting every word down that the lecturer says or with writing your notes grammatically correctly. Learn to write telegraphic sentences or a streamlined version of the main points of the lecture by leaving out unnecessary words and using only key words. To ensure that your notes make sense weeks later, after the lecture is over, fill in blanks or make incomplete sentences complete.

Reduce or question

After you read through your notes, your next step is to reduce important facts and ideas to key words or phrases, or to formulate questions based on the facts and ideas. Key words, phrases, and questions are written in the narrow column left of the six-inch column. The words and phrases act as memory cues so that when you review them, you will recall the ideas or facts. The questions help to clarify the meanings of the facts and ideas.

Recite

Recitation is a very powerful process in the retention of information. Reciting is different from rereading in that you state *out loud* and *in your own words* the facts and ideas you are trying to learn. It is an effective way to learn because hearing your thoughts helps you to sharpen your

thinking process; and stating ideas and facts in your own words challenges you to think about the meaning of the information. When reciting, cover up your notes in the six-inch column, while leaving the cue words and questions uncovered and readily accessible. Next, read each key word or question, then recite and state aloud, in your own words, the information. If your answer is correct, continue on through the lecture by reciting aloud.

Reflect

Reflection is pondering or thinking about the information you have learned. Reflecting is a step beyond learning note content. It reinforces deeper learning by the relating of facts and ideas to other learning and knowledge. Questions like the following enhance reflecting: How do these facts and ideas fit into what I already know? How can I apply them? How is knowing this important? What is the significance of these facts and ideas?

Review

The way to prevent forgetting is to review and recite your notes frequently. A good guideline to follow is to review your notes nightly or several times during the week by reciting, not rereading. Brief review sessions planned throughout the semester, perhaps weekly, will aid more complete comprehension and retention of information than will cramming the day before a test. It will cut on stress too!

Recapitulate

The recapitulation or *summary* of your notes goes at the bottom of the note page in the two-inch block column. Taking a few minutes after you have reduced, recited, and reflected to summarize the facts and ideas in your notes will help you integrate your information. The summary should not be a word-for-word rewriting of your notes. It should be in your own words and reflect the main points you want to remember from your notes. Reading through your summary(ies) in preparation for an exam is a good way to review. There are three ways to go about summarizing:

1. Summarize each page of notes at the bottom of each page.
2. Summarize the whole lecture on the last page.
3. Do both 1 and 2, in combination.