

Wholebrain note taking/making (*NOTES TM*)

NOTES TM is short for **Notes: taking and making**. The most important feature of this system is that it allows you to record your personal thoughts and conclusions along with the key parts of a lecture or reading material.

In order to learn *NOTES TM* you need to understand the distinction between **note taking** and **note making**. Note **taking** involves listening to what a speaker or lecturer is saying and writing down the key points as you go. Note **making** involves writing down your own thoughts as you listen to the material being presented. *NOTES TM* lets you do both things at once—record the information and keep track of your own thoughts.

This method is a way of applying both your conscious and unconscious minds to the same material in a purposeful way. Actually, both minds are at work no matter what method we are using. While our conscious minds are intently focusing on the material and the process of getting it down on paper, our subconscious minds are reacting, forming impressions, making connections, and doing a whole host of things more or less automatically. *NOTES TM* coordinates both of these mental activities to achieve a more effective result.

How to use *NOTES TM*

Start with a piece of paper and draw a line vertically about one-third of the way in from the right edge. The left side of the paper is for **taking** notes; the right is for **making** notes.



On the left side, write what the speaker is saying — key points, terms, diagrams and figures. On the right, record your thoughts, feelings, reactions, questions, and concerns, pretty much as they come up. On the note taking side, limit yourself to the information that's coming to you from the outside. On the note making side, write whatever comes into your mind without censoring it.

Writing down your thoughts in this way helps you to focus your concentration and bring your attention back to what the speaker is saying. Later, it can help you better understand the notes you took, remind you of things you want to cross-check, spur you to make phone calls, or just pick out the items that had the biggest impact on you when you were hearing them.

When using the *NOTES TM* technique, take a minute or two after the lecture or reading to go back over your notes and add your own personal graphics—symbols and pictures that are meaningful to you. It's best to make up your own symbols, but you can use simple ideas like smiley faces, arrows, stars, exclamation marks or numbers. Make use of colour too. The symbols can mean anything you want them to mean. However, stay with the same symbols and meanings once you have developed your system.

When you review your notes, the symbols will speak to you, triggering your mind to remember what the lecturer or the writer said as well as help you relive what you were thinking at the time, consciously or unconsciously. Often, the most important thing we get from a lecture is not the material itself, but the ideas it sparks in our minds.

This technique works just as well for reading material. Because you are going at your own pace when you are reading, you don't need to worry if you are missing any material in your note taking.

Note taking tips

- 1. Listen actively** Ask yourself questions such as: What is important? How does this relate to the subject? Notes should focus on material that's important or will be needed later.
- 2. Observe actively** Always sit as close to the front of the room as possible. Pay attention to the clues you can pick up from the reading material or the speaker.
- 3. Participate** If you don't understand, if it's in a class situation, ask. You may not always be able to do this in a lecture. Join in discussions. Don't hold back and worry about what others might think.
- 4. Preview** During this course, we've talked about the importance of prior knowledge in the learning process. Previewing the material you are going to learn about and finding information on it beforehand is a great aid to note taking. As you hear bits of information, you'll find it easier to see how they fit into the big picture. Previewing doesn't need to take much time. All you might need to do is scan articles or notes, or read headings. Previewing gets your mind ready.
- 5. Make the auditory visual** Your notes should be personal and meaningful to you, just like snapshots. Snap pictures of the information by adding visual associations like symbols and drawings or arrows as they occur to you. This way, your notes, even if they are reviewed months later, will remind you instantly of the material that was important at the time and that you need to recall now.
- 6. Make reviewing easy** When taking notes, write only on one side of the paper. Then you can lay out the sheets in front of you when you need to review them later.

Mind mapping and *NOTES TM*

Have you noticed that mind mapping and *NOTES TM* share similarities? That's because you are using both sides of your brain to help you think and not just one side. You are using your creativity, imagination, feelings and intuition as well as your organising and reasoning abilities. You will have a much better chance of remembering the information.

What are the benefits of *NOTES TM*?

1. As I said earlier, you will find the information easier to remember when you read what you were thinking about at the time.
2. *NOTES TM* focuses your emotions and helps you tap into your emotional memory.
3. *NOTES TM* is constructive daydreaming. It occupies your mind and makes you aware of your thoughts and where they are drifting so you can bring them back and stay more in control. This helps you when you feel the speaker isn't talking fast enough or saying enough to keep your interest.
4. It records your judgements and makes you more aware of them so you can be more open to seeing another side. It's especially helpful to write down when you disagree with the speaker or don't believe what the speaker is saying. You can tell yourself that, although you might disagree, you can listen—and keep an open mind while you are listening.

Like anything else that is new, this technique requires you to practise it. The more you do this, the more effective you will find it.

Adapted from *Quantum learning* by Bobbi De Porter (1992)

