Effective Note Taking at Sheridan College

Honesty, Trust, Fairness, Respect, Responsibility, Courage

Effective note-taking helps you to

1. Retain information
2. Focus in class
3. Better understand course material
4. Improve your organizational skills
5. Identify important information
6. Prepare efficiently for tests and exams
7. Avoid plagiarism

What is Effective Note Taking?

Effective note-taking is preparing notes in a way that’s organized and meaningful to you. It supports your learning and boosts academic success. In college, you take notes:

- In class during lectures
- During the research process

Taking in-class notes

Did you know that within two weeks, the average person forgets almost everything that they have learned? (Horton, 2012). Whether writing notes by hand, or typing notes on your laptop, improving your in-class note-taking skills will help you better retain information. But taking in-class notes also requires effort before and after class.

Before class

Familiarize yourself with the class lesson beforehand:

- Review the course outline
- Read the class notes and/or PowerPoint slides
- Do the assigned course readings
- Make a note of any questions you may have

During class

- Note the date so that you can later reference the material quickly
- Give your full attention to the lecture, and do your best to minimize distractions
- Don’t try to write down everything you hear
- Distinguish between main points and explanations and ask questions if you don’t understand
- Put the content in your own words; include your own examples
- Use symbols and abbreviations
- Leave lots of space in your notes for adding in information later
- Listen for hints of what you might expect on an upcoming test or exam
- Draw quick diagrams, graphics or mind-maps as needed to help comprehension (Sheridan College, 2017)
After class

- Discuss anything you don’t understand with classmates or ask your professor
- Review your notes within 24 hours
- Transfer your notes to a different format to make the material clearer (e.g. split page format, the Cornell method or a mind map – ask the library for more information or examples)
- Write a summary of the key ideas
- Use highlighters to distinguish different types of content
- Fill in any missing information
- Consider your own opinions and ideas about the topic(s) covered

Research notes for an assignment

When you take notes to prepare for an assignment, you do so in order to find support for your topic. This support will be directly related to your research question or thesis statement. Some tips:

- Ensure you understand your professor’s expectations for the assignment
- Ensure you know how to locate appropriate sources. For help, visit the library
- Write down the topic and your thesis statement research question
- Create a tentative outline including any main topics and sub-topics
- Use one page for each source and include all the bibliographic information for that source
- Paraphrase by putting the content into your own words to help you understand the material you’re reading
- If you locate text that would work well as a direct quotation, make note of the page number
- Organize your notes by grouping similar information together
- Keep your notes as proof if there is any suspected breach of academic integrity
Tutoring
The Tutoring Centre offers tutoring at no additional cost to Sheridan students. Once you’ve taken your notes, get help with writing your paper, practicing your presentation, and more.

Visit us:
- Davis – Room J104
- HMC – Room A118B
- Trafalgar – Room C113
Website: tutoring.sheridancollege.ca
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Academic Integrity Office
Visit this office at any of the three campuses for support, resources, and information regarding academic integrity.
- Trafalgar – C151a
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Citation and Reference Specialists
Get citation support to help avoid plagiarism from one of the Citation and Reference Specialists through drop-in and appointments. Go to the Library Service Desk at the library of each campus.

References