

# How To Take Good Notes



It's the night before your big history test. Your teacher said, "Everything on the test will be something we discussed in class." So you open up your notebook and turn to the history section. There you find:

- A complete game of Tic Tac Toe.
- Three new ways to write your signature.
- Four words, one of which appears to be "mflgyx."

This doesn't have to happen. Students who know and use the skill of taking notes have a head start every time they study for a test. They have a handy list of what the teacher believes to be the main points of the subject. And not surprisingly, these kids usually do pretty well when test time comes.

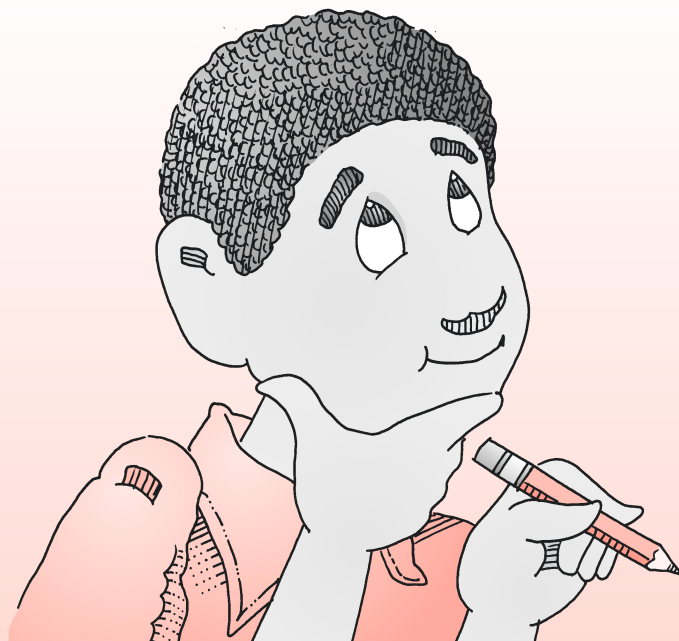
Here's how you can become one of those students who knows how to take good notes.

## Get in the habit of taking notes in class

*Taking notes* requires that:

- You pay attention to what the teacher is saying.
- You really *listen* as the teacher explains the subject.
- You make decisions about what's important enough to write down.
- You engage your brain and you're thinking.

Later, when it's time to review, you won't need to rely only on your memory because you have a written record of what your teacher said.

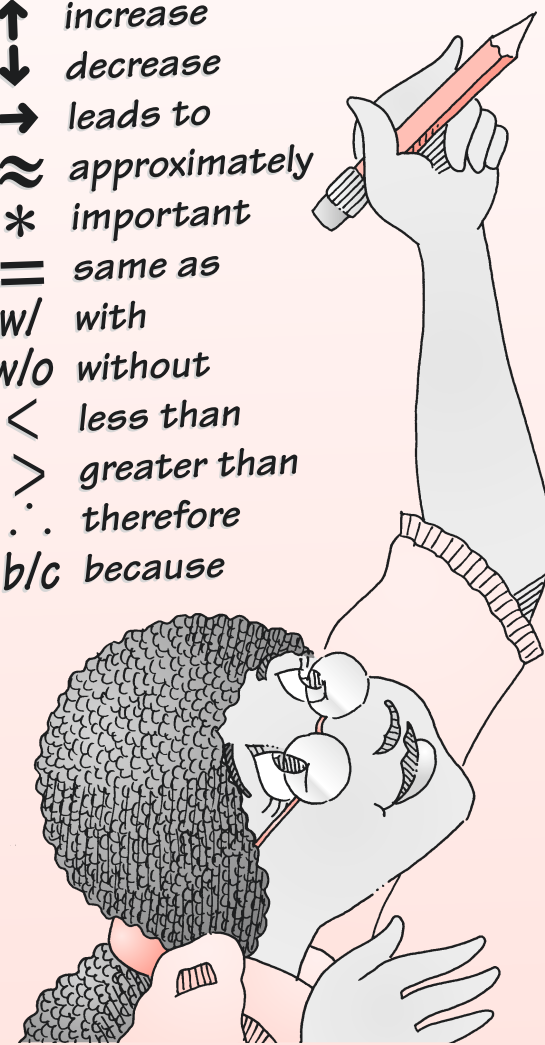


## Create your own shorthand

Teachers can talk faster than you can write. So you have to find ways to shorten some words. One easy tip is to use just the first three or four letters in a word—*esp* for *especially*, or *rep* for *representative*. If you make up an abbreviation, make sure you spell it out in the margin as soon as possible so you'll remember it when it's time to review.

Symbols can eliminate words altogether. Try these symbols—or make up your own.

- ↑ *increase*
- ↓ *decrease*
- *leads to*
- ≈ *approximately*
- \* *important*
- = *same as*
- w/ *with*
- w/o *without*
- < *less than*
- > *greater than*
- ∴ *therefore*
- b/c *because*



# How To Take Good Notes

Whether you're taking notes while you're reading or taking notes in class, here are some tips to make the job a little easier.

## Be selective when you're taking notes in class

You can't write down everything the teacher says, even if your teacher talks ... very ... slowly. Focus on the main points and any important details. How can you tell what's important? The teacher will usually give you a hint. Your teacher might:

- Repeat something several times.
- Write something on the board or overhead.
- Speak more loudly or more distinctly.
- Give a list of items.
- Define a word.
- Pause to give students taking notes time to finish writing.
- Say something like, "The point is ..."
- Summarize the main idea at the end of class.

And, of course, another surefire clue that something is important enough to write down is when your teacher says, "This will be on the unit test next Tuesday."

## Take notes when you're reading your assignment

Taking notes as you read an assignment will help you focus your attention on the main points. To spot the main ideas, look for clues like headlines, **boldface** or *italic* type. Look for data tables, charts, photos or drawings. Look for any text set off in a box. If the author goes to the trouble of calling the reader's attention to something, that's a good sign it's an important point. If there are questions at the end of the assignment, read them first to see what to look for as you read.

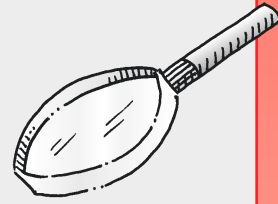


## Find a way to highlight main points

When you review your notes, you want to be able to identify main points right away. So as you're taking notes, find a way to indicate what's most important. Here are three examples:

1. Divide your paper. Draw a line down the middle of your paper. Write the main idea on the left and the supporting details on the right.
2. Use an outline.
  - I. Write the main idea at the left margin.
    - A. Indent for details.
      1. A specific fact might be indented even more.
3. Highlight key points. Draw a line under a key fact. WRITE IN CAPITAL LETTERS, use a highlighter or \*mark with stars\*.

## Use your notes to study



After class, look over your notes while you can still remember what the teacher said. You'll be able to correct mistakes or spell out anything you couldn't finish writing. Try writing a short summary of the most important points covered in that day's class.

Look over your notes again before the next class. This will make it easier to keep up with your teacher.

Before you take a test, review your notes once again. Using the notes, make up a list of questions you believe may be on the test. You'll review important material—and you'll

probably be prepared for many of the questions that appear on the test.

Once you've learned to take good notes, you have a skill you can use in or out of class. Knowing how to spot and make note of important points will help you study smarter, remember longer and do better in school.

