Study Guide Quick Tips
Note Taking

In higher education, the words which an instructor uses in giving a lecture are carefully chosen to convey some important message. You must be able to receive this message and communicate your understanding of the message to the professor. Follow these five steps for taking more effective notes.

Step 1: Prepare Before Going Into Class. Read textbook assignments and be familiar with the content of the lecture notes from the previous meeting of this class.

Step 2: Structure Your Notebook. (Preferably 8½" x 11") in the following format before taking any notes.

Step 3: Take Your Lecture Notes. Write within the center 4” wide space according to the following principles:

- Record your notes using either the paragraph or outline method.
- Listen, think, then write. Listen for key words, ideas and their relationships.
- Then think of the individual ideas in terms of the whole subject. Finally, write down brief but adequate phrases to describe the idea.
- Paraphrase. Use your own words instead of trying to record your instructor's exact words. The one exception is the definition of terms which should be recorded exactly as given by the instructor.
- Copy most of the diagrams or drawings that your instructor presents.
- Learn to identify main points and ideas by being alert for information which is emphasized by means of repetition or illustration.
- Use underlining or symbols to identify any points that the instructor stressed.
- Leave a space when a point is missed. Get it immediately after class from the instructor.

Step 4: Use Your Lecture Notes. As soon as possible after class, read through your notes to begin the process of transferring information from your short-term memory to your long-term memory.
Apply the following principles in maximizing this process:

- After a thorough but quick review of your notes, begin to condense your notes to only the most important or hard to remember points. Write this condensed version of your notes in the left-hand margin of your paper.
- After condensing your notes, check to see that the condensed version of your notes covers the information from your in class notes. A simple procedure to accomplish this is to fold your paper over covering all but the 2” left-hand margin. Then recite the material using only your condensed notes.
- Record in the top margin any questions you may have about your notes. Ask your instructor about these questions as soon as possible, making sure you do not wait any longer than the next class meeting.
- Record in the bottom margin any extremely hard to remember pieces of information from that page of notes. Before a test, compile these bits of information onto note cards so that you may review them in a systematic way immediately before the test.
- Use the 2” right margin to prepare for yourself a brief quiz on the lecture material on a given page of notes. Take this quiz a couple of days before the exam to give yourself an indication of how well you know your notes. The results of these quizzes will show you which specific areas you need to spend the most time studying before the test.

Step 5: Review Your Notes for about five minutes the same day you take them and at least twice a week for about a half hour each time, using the pre-planned time intervals for your weekly time schedule.