

How to take great notes

Taking good notes requires students to evaluate, organize and summarize information. It's a key survival skill your child will need through high school and beyond.

By GreatSchools Staff

<http://www.greatschools.org/students/homework-help/323-take-great-notes.gs?page=all>

Your child may be able to type "CUL8R" faster than any of his text-messaging friends, but that doesn't mean he understands the process and purpose of taking notes.

As he moves through middle and high school, he'll need to develop the ability to take good notes — from class lectures, reading assignments and research materials. That's where parents can help, says author and California high school teacher Jim Burke.

"Sometimes you have to sit down and say, here's this whole chapter. How do you decide what's important? What are you going to use these notes for? To take a test? To write a paper?" said Burke, whose [The Reader's Handbook](#) explains reading strategies and tools for high school students.

"Students who don't take notes well, don't use them," he says. "They lose faith in the process."

Burke prefers to use the term "note-making" — making meaning from information — to the more passive "note-taking." Note-making, he says, is "manipulating information to make it sticky." Some students can make information "stick" by making outlines. For other more visual learners, colors might work better. Burke gives the example of one student who went back over her science notes using red highlighter to indicate blood and blue for oxygen.

Taking notes in class

Writing at the speed of speech can be daunting even for an adult. These tips may help your student as he develops his own system:

Start a new page for each new class each day.

Date it. Leave space between topics or ideas so you can scan the page more easily later.

Take down key words and concepts, not sentences.

Develop your own system of abbreviations or symbols (such as w/ for "with" or math symbols such as > or =) to take down key points.

Listen for word clues from the teacher.

Teachers often signal what's important to note, using phrases such as "the three incidents that led to the War of 1812 were... .."

Review notes after class to make sure they're accurate and complete.

Doing this just before starting homework in a particular subject can help a student focus on the topic at hand.

Taking notes from reading

Many experts advise students to pre-read a textbook chapter to get an idea about what it is about, rather than simply wading in. Students can grasp the main themes by first reading the introduction text, subheads, graphics, photo captions, summary paragraphs and study questions at the end.

"Pay attention to anything the textbook publisher has used typographical features to emphasize," says Burke,

Getting an overview will help your child get focused on what's important as she starts to take notes, rather than getting mired in the details.

Accuracy and attribution are essential skills journalists learn in preparing their stories. These skills are equally important to your student when she is preparing to write a research paper or take a test.

Help her learn to summarize information in her own words, rather than copying the textbook. This will ensure that she understands what she has read and help her learn it. Help her get in the habit of putting quotation marks around passages that are direct quotes from an author so she can attribute words that aren't her own.

Finally, if your child is struggling, she may be having trouble reading. Ask her to explain a chapter she's read. If you can see that her comprehension is a problem, make an appointment to talk to the teacher or her counselor so you can get her the help she may need.