

Using the Cornell Note-Taking System

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Summary: Describes the Cornell note-taking system.

Learning Objectives: To name the advantages of the Cornell note-taking system. To describe the sections of the Cornell note page. To describe how a student would use a Cornell-style note page during a lecture.

As you attend your first few college classes, you may be intimidated by the kind and nature of the notes that you need to take, and note taking may even be difficult for you because it is generally not taught in high school. When it comes to note taking, there are many different kinds of “systems” or options, and each system has its benefits and drawbacks. One of the more effective and efficient options is the **Cornell note-taking system**. This system allows you to keep your notes organized, summarize the main points of a lecture quickly, and review for tests more efficiently. This handout discusses when to use Cornell notes, what the advantages are to using the Cornell system, and how to structure and use Cornell notes.

When to Use the Cornell Note-Taking Method

In the 1950s, a professor of education at Cornell University, Walter Pauk, wanted to find a more effective way for his students to take notes. He developed the Cornell note-taking method as a solution. The great thing about his system is that you can use it for **any class or subject**.

Cornell notes are arranged in a way that allows you to organize your notes, so you’ll find important information more easily. You can use them during a lecture, and while you read the assigned chapters in your textbooks, you can write down the main points (like vocabulary words and important dates) using Cornell notes.



Advantages of Cornell Note Taking

There are many advantages of using the Cornell note-taking system because it is set up so you see the main points of the lecture—vocabulary words, important dates and people, theories, steps to math problems, processes, etc. The following are advantages to using the Cornell note-taking method:

- ◆ Keeps your notes organized, so you can revise and review them later.
- ◆ Allows you to find important information easier.
- ◆ Focuses on important concepts like vocabulary words, dates and people, theories, processes, etc.
- ◆ Provides an efficient method of taking notes during any kind of lecture.



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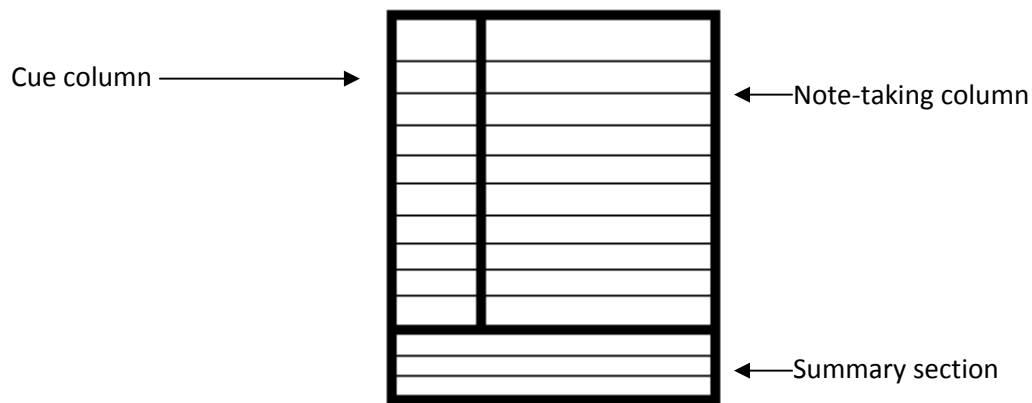
- ◆ Allows for an easier way to study that can lead to higher grades in college.
- ◆ Allows you to review for tests in an organized way.

How to Structure and Use Cornell Notes

There is a specific way that the Cornell note page should look. You can either download sheets from www.englishcompanion.com or make your own sheets with notebook paper.

If you are converting a sheet of notebook paper into the Cornell note page, then you'll need to draw a few sections:

1. First, measure a 2 ½ inch margin on the left side of the page and draw a vertical line from the top of the page to about the fourth line from the bottom. You might want to go over the lines with a black marker just so the lines are more visible.
2. Then draw a horizontal line across the page on the fourth line from the bottom. Here is a small version of what the note page should look like, but you can download it from the internet to see the real size of the document.



Now that you have the structure of the note page, let's discuss the purpose of each section.

The right side of the page is called the note taking column, which (as you can tell from the name of the column) is for taking notes. The left margin is called the cue column or connections column which will contain information that signals what the information in the note-taking column is. And the bottom section is where the summary of the notes goes.

Instructions on How to Use the Cornell Note-Taking Method

Now that you've created a Cornell notes page (or downloaded one), let's talk about how you might use the pages you've created during the lecture (or when you're reading the assigned chapters), after the lecture, and when reviewing for a test.

During the Lecture

During the lecture (or when you're reading chapters that you've been assigned), you'll want to follow these directions:

- 1) Start by labeling the top of the page with your **name, date, topic, and class or subject**. If you are writing notes for a chapter, you can write the chapter number and its title as the topic. In a lecture, the topic could be the main point of the lecture. (Check your syllabus—often the main topic is there.)



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- 2) Take notes in the note-taking column during any lecture or while reading your textbook. There are several ways you can take these notes, but you should always pick out the important information. For example, you may want to record information like vocabulary words, dates, concepts, theories, and important people and their significance. When it comes to math classes, the steps to solving a problem would be the kind of information you would want to include.

After the Lecture

Immediately after the lecture or after you've finished reading the chapter, follow these steps.

- 3) After class has ended or you have finished reading the chapter (make sure that it is as soon as you have time after class), re-read your notes and revise them as needed. For example, if something does not make sense to you, then revise it so it does, look up words you don't know, or review concepts. Remember these are your notes, so you have to be able to get the information you need out of them.
- 4) In the cue column, write cues in order to make your notes easier to read. So what is a "cue"? A "cue" can be many things, but they commonly fall into one of these categories:
 - a) Questions: Questions help you memorize the main points of the lecture and study for the test later. You can also use questions to remind yourself to research an issue further or to remind yourself to ask a question in the next class session.
 - b) Categories: If there is information that is grouped together in the notes, you might want to put what the category is in this column. For example, if you are discussing the different parts of speech, you could label them in the cue column.
 - c) Vocabulary: Any vocabulary word could be written in this column so it will be easier to find when you are studying.
 - d) Notifications: If something specific is going to be on the test, then you could use this space to identify the location of those things in the notes.
- 5) Once you have finished the cue column, write a short summary of the lecture or the chapter at the bottom of the page. If you don't think a summary would help you, you could include the five main points of the notes or any questions that you still do not know the answer to. These questions could then be asked at the next lecture. You should start writing your summary as soon as you have the time. You have two options of when you can write the summary: you can write the summary immediately after the lecture when it is fresh on your mind, or you could wait a few hours to give yourself time for the lecture to sink in a little more.

When Reviewing for the Test

Finally, when it's time to take your test, complete the following step:

- 6) Then when you are ready to study for the test, cover the note-taking section with a blank sheet of paper. By looking at the cues in the left column, you should be able to answer the questions, name the information in the categories, define the vocabulary words, and recite the specific information your professor said was going to be on the test.

See the final page of this handout for the way one student organized his notes about the beginning of World War II.

Tip: Start studying early. Just because a test is a month away does not mean you shouldn't worry about it until the day before. If you take 30 minutes a day (or more) to review your notes, you will be more prepared for the test.



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Tips to Writing Notes and Studying

The Cornell note-taking method might be one of the most effective methods, but you still have to know how to write notes and how to study. The following list includes some tips that might help you take notes and study in order to be successful in college:

- ◆ Use an outline form for your notes because it is easier to see how items correlate with each other and to see the main points of the notes.
- ◆ Use a recorder to record the lecture, but only if your professor allows you to (always ask for permission first). This way you can record and take notes, but then go back and listen to the lecture to get the points that you might have missed. **Do not rely solely on your recording.** You should take notes during class even if you're allowed to record the lecture.
- ◆ Write down any kind of charts or figures that the instructor draws or displays. Visual learners tend to remember information better if there are charts involved.
- ◆ Highlight any keywords or phrases, important people, specific steps, etc. in your notes so they will be easy to spot when you are studying.
- ◆ Use symbols and abbreviations in your notes that make sense to you.
- ◆ Use telegraphic sentences, which is a straightforward sentence that excludes unnecessary words. (Ex. Germ. invade Pol. 9/39.)

When it comes to note taking, the Cornell note-taking system is not the only option, but it is an effective and efficient way to take notes. And, the Cornell note-taking method is a good way to structure your notes so you see the main concepts easier. This method plays a huge role in making studying for tests successful. The more organized your notes are, the easier it will be for you to study for tests efficiently and effectively.



Other Academic Center resources you may find useful include the following:

- Improving Concentration When Studying
- Overcoming Test Anxiety



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Name: John Smith
Date: June 2, 2010

Class: US History
Topic: WWII

Cue Column	Notes
What triggered WWII?	Germany invaded Poland in 9/1939.
Why?	Said Germany needed lebensraum "living space" (territory)
Axis of Power:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Germany◆ Japan◆ Italy◆ Soviet Union (allied w/Germany from 1939-6/22/41)
Why did Japan and Italy support Germany?	Japan wanted to take over east Asia. Italy wanted to take over the Mediterranean and the Balkans by taking advantage of Germany's success.
Grand Alliance:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ U.S.◆ Soviet Union (after 9/41 and Lend-Lease agreement)◆ Great Britain
What was Lend-Lease?	Allowed the U.S. to sell, transfer, exchange, lend equipment to the Allies.
What was Hitler's plan?	Final Solution- plan to execute all Jews in Europe. Extend German territory.
Different kinds of camps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Labor- open when hard labor was needed◆ Extermination- eliminates "undesirables"◆ Concentration- work to death (starvation/disease)◆ Transit and Collection- German efficiency- routing
Other prisoners:	Homosexuals, Gypsies, Communists, and Jehovah's witnesses
U.S. enters war:	U.S. enters war 12/41 Entered because of the attack on Pearl Harbor by Japan.
How did U.S. support Britain and France before entering the war?	Gave machinery, weapon, and ammunition.
Summary: WWII began 9/1939 when Hitler invaded Poland. Germany, Italy, and Japan = axis of power; the U.S., Gr. Britain, and the Soviet Union = grand alliance after 1941. Hitler's main goal was to get more territory/security and execute the Jews (the Final Solution). America entered war in 1941 when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.	



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