Effective Note Taking Strategies

1. **Handwriting notes can increase learning by forcing you to synthesize information.** Because our hands cannot write as fast as a person speaks (unless you can write short hand), we synthesize information when taking notes. The key is developing your ability to synthesize information to pick up key information from the lecture. Pay attention to when you instructor repeats something, uses a different tone, or stresses a concept’s importance. This information should be noted so you can review it later or use the information as a reminder to research more after class.

2. **Don’t try to write word-for-word what the lecturer/instructor is saying.** You will miss important information if you are too busy trying to “transcribe” the lecture. Using a computer can be beneficial in certain classes, but often it’s better to avoid taking notes on an electronic device. Using a computer to write exactly what your instructor is saying is a bad idea—you end up concentrating on transcribing the lecture, not on processing the lecture. You won’t realize you don’t understand the information until you’re studying and trying to make sense of concepts that were taught while you were transcribing.

3. **Write notes you will use.** One of the most effective note-taking styles is the Cornell System:

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<tr>
<th>SUBJECT/DATE</th>
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| MAIN IDEA |

Begin by taking notes in class using the right-hand column. Next, go back through and write key terms/point in the left-hand margin to easily identify what the notes relate to. Finally, at the bottom of the notes write the main idea. This helps you quickly identify the main concepts, which is helpful when reviewing notes.
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Another effective way to take notes is “mind-mapping,” which consists of starting with the main idea and “branching” information from the main idea.

Example:

```
Type 1 Diabetes
  - Long-term effects
  - Insulin therapy
  - Treatments

Number of Diabetics
  - Future cure?
  - Stem cell research
  - Clinical trials

University of Chicago successes
  - 6 out 10 type 1 diabetics no longer require insulin therapy

Total number (US): approx. 30 mil
Type 1 diabetics: approx. 1.25 mil
```

4. **Swap notes with a classmate to gain another perspective.** People absorb and synthesize information in different ways, which means notes can differ. Reviewing a classmate’s notes from the same lectures can help you see material that you missed or misunderstood.