

Tips for the Face-To-Face Learner on Surviving the Sudden Switch to Online Classes: NOTETAKING.

Dr. Eevin Jennings, March 16th, 2020

I created this very short guide under the assumption that you did NOT sign up for an online course and are instead having to swiftly adapt to this new method of learning. These tips help you strategize your notetaking. It does not matter if you use a laptop or paper/pen. What *does* matter is that you try to limit distractions (including other websites/cell phones, if possible), avoid procrastination, and try to implement these tips. Everything I mention is based on empirical research. No “belief,” preference, or opinion-based advice is provided here.

Pro Tip: Ask yourself, “What would Next Month Me want to see on these notes? What can I do/clarify so that I will have no confusion when reading these again later?”

For pre-recorded video lectures:

1. Watch lectures in *small bites*.

- a. I suggest 5-minute bites or collections of information that seem to be grouped together (i.e., “Early psychologists,” versus “psychological perspectives” can be broken up into 2 different lecture bites).
- b. *Between* bites, take 2-5 minutes to organize your notes, circle things that you need more clarification on, add your own examples, star important points (*), add questions to ask your professor, add some pictures/drawings, and correct potentially confusing information. Think about how you will have NO idea what some of that information means a few weeks from now when you come back to study it. You’ll need to take notes for “Next Month You” as much as CURRENT You.
- c. You can A) watch the lecture bites first and take notes between, or you can B) take notes during bites and use breaks to revise. Just make sure you add in that break to take or evaluate your notes! Sometimes you can start out using method B and switch to A once you get the feel for the lecture.

short version: break the lecture down into small chunks and revise your notes between them.

2. Don’t pause the video every 5 seconds to write down every single word.

- a. You wouldn’t do this in face-to-face lecture right? You would wait for the professor to explain a bit more. The same applies to notetaking during video lectures. Sometimes,

you have to get the full 5 minutes to understand what would have otherwise been super confusing the first 30 seconds. Go back to the beginning of the lecture bite if you need to re-clarify something.

short version: let the lecture play a bit before deciding whether you understand.

3. Use what I call the *Hierarchical Organization* technique.

- a. This way, you know what the main ideas, important details, and smaller details are. This helps you both learn and remember the information better.
 - Main idea (“Psychological Perspectives”)
 - Important detail 1 (“Biological”)
 - Small detail or example 1 (“Brain & behavior”)
 - Small detail or example 2 (“NTs”)
 - (continue)
 - Important detail 2 (“Cognitive”)
 - Small detail or example 1 (“Thoughts”)
 - Small detail or example 2 (“Intelligence”)

Essentially looks like this:

- “Psychological Perspectives”
 - Biological
 - Brain & behavior
 - NTs
 - Ex: neurosc.
 - Cognitive
 - Thoughts
 - Intelligence
 - Ex: computers vs ppl

Compared to a “linear” organization technique (the hard way!)

- “Psychological Perspectives”
- Biological
- Brain & behavior
- NTs
- Ex: neurosc.
- Cognitive
- Thoughts
- Intelligence

- Ex: computers vs ppl

How will *Next Month You* be able to tell which one is an example versus a concept?

Short version: identify main ideas, details, and examples in your notes.

For live-streaming lectures:

1. use shorthand (“Rule Number 1” = “#1”). *Don’t waste time.*
2. Circle things that you don’t understand right then and there. Ask questions in the chat or to the professor if possible.
3. IMMEDIATELY after the lecture ends, spend time organizing/clarifying your notes, circle things that you need more clarification on, add your own examples, star important points (*), add questions to ask your professor, add some pictures/drawings, and correct potentially confusing information. Think about how you will have NO idea what some of that information means a few weeks from now when you come back to study it. You’ll need to take notes for Next Month You as much as CURRENT you.

For everyone:

1. Do some light reading over the chapter/content to be discussed before watching the lecture.
 - a. That way, you’re not spending time trying to understand the basic information and you can concentrate on other issues that arise.
2. Understand that will make inaccurate judgments about your memory/learning.
 - a. Understand that because you have video lectures available to you, how well you may FEEL you understand the content is *highly* unlikely to reflect how well you ACTUALLY understand the content (which leads to “lite” study methods and subsequently, worse performance).
 - b. Do **not** change the rigor of your studying or notetaking just because the course is now online. Treat it as though it were still an in-person class, especially since additional challenges will be present. Do not sacrifice notetaking because the video is “always available.” You should take notes regardless; research supports this claim!
3. Assert yourself and ask your professor (or TA) to clarify *anything* that did not make 100% sense to you.
 - a. Ask for an example (or a different one)!

- b. Asking for help is completely acceptable and 100% in your control; your professor can't read minds and doesn't always know what you're thinking.