



## Let's Take Some Notes

Taking good notes in class is important, but how do you do it? Do you write down every single thing your teacher says? Or do you wait for “This is important. Take note of this.” Neither of these approaches is very effective. Either you’re writing down way too much, or way too little. So how do you know what to jot down?

The key to effective note taking is to identify **the most important bits** of information that your teacher spits out. Just remember to be concise.

Imagine your teacher’s lecture is written down on paper. You do the same you’d normally do when you’re completing a reading assignment. You highlight three things:

### *The most important*

**BIG IDEAS**—These are the things your teacher wants you know when you leave the classroom. Look for your teacher to mention this at the beginning of class. “Today we’re going to talk about (blank).” Ever heard your teacher say something like, “if you learn nothing else from this class, I want you to know this”? That’s probably a good time to scratch something down in your notebook.

**TERMS**—Probably appear in the form of words you don’t understand. Jot down the word and the teacher’s explanation of what that words means. It’s okay to ask the teacher to repeat the things you miss!

**CONCEPTS**—These are things like theories and methods that your teacher wants you to know so that you can apply them in your own work. For example, if your English teacher started explaining how to write a thesis, or if your psychology teacher started talking about control and variable groups, you should jot these things down in your notes so that you can use them later.

**NAMES and DATES**—This is pretty straightforward. This includes names of people, places, documents and publications, etc. Remember that only the important names should end up in your notes. Same thing applies to dates. If your teacher mentions an important time period or specific date, write it down.

### *Customize your notes and stay organized*

Remember, these are your notes, so you’re the only one who needs to understand them. If that means making up symbols for yourself, then do it (example: “!” could mean that you need to know this for the test). It’s also important to keep yourself organized. Even if they are your notes, it’s a good idea to write neat enough for you to read, and to organize your notes during the class period, so that you can better keep track of the lessons your teacher has given you.

EXAMPLE: William Shakespeare is one of the most famous poets and playwrights of all time. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, in the year 1564 and later died in 1616. Many of his plays were performed at the Globe Theater in London. Probably the most famous of his plays are Romeo and Juliet and Hamlet, two tragedies that are still taught in high schools across the country today. It is a common misconception that Shakespeare wrote in “old English” when he actually wrote in “early modern English.” Shakespeare is also famous for frequently incorporating into his poetry and plays, “iambic pentameter,” a type of rhythmical meter used in poetry and verse drama.

Here are my notes:

- 3/24/12 – Shakespeare
- Born Stratford-upon-Avon, 1564. Died 1616.
- Plays at Globe Theater, London.
- Romeo and Juliet + Hamlet=famous tragedies.
- \*\*\*Wrote in early modern Eng. (IMPORTANT!)
- “iambic pentameter” – rhythmic meter in poetry and verse drama