Two-Column Note-Taking Model

The basic plan for the Two-Column Note-Taking strategy appears on Penn State University’s Center for Academic Achievement website: [http://www.sl.psu.edu/Documents/StudentServices/Note_Taking_Strategies.pdf?cn26](http://www.sl.psu.edu/Documents/StudentServices/Note_Taking_Strategies.pdf?cn26).

Assessment Committee members modified the strategy to incorporate components of other note-taking strategies with which they were familiar. Members also made some modifications to the outline provided on the website, changing its organization slightly.

The goal of the two-column note-taking strategy is to teach students an efficient method of recording notes from a lecture while simultaneously providing an effective active review tool. The method teaches students how to use their notebook paper effectively; record such basics as the date, topic, and page number; listen for signal words and other cues that reflect importance; and record the notes in a pattern that is clear, organized, and designed to serve as a tool for active processing of the information.

In order to use the strategy, students will need to be taught to recognize signal words or phrases, transitions, and other clue words. Signal words and phrases (examples include several methods, four types, various reasons, five steps, numerous barriers, etc.) signal to the listener that the teacher has announced his main point and that he will next provide the subordinating details.

Transition words also signal to the listener the organization of the lecture. Addition transitions (examples include first, second, next, also, finally, etc.) allow the listener to follow the subordinating details. Time transitions (first, next, then, before, after, etc.) allow the listener to attend to the sequence of an event or process. Other transitions denote such patterns as cause/effect (because, consequently, result, reason, etc.), comparison/contrast (like, similarly, difference, but, nevertheless, etc.), and definition and example (is, means, illustrate, for instance, etc.).

Other clue words can take a variety of forms. Statements such as the teacher saying “This will be on the test,” “This is important,” “Listen up,” or “You’ll see this again” are all forms of clue words. Even the teacher’s repeating something or writing something on the board falls into the category of clues to importance and should be recognized by the student for what they are.

Recognizing and understanding signal words, transitions, and other clue words provide the foundation for students to be able to record the main ideas and supporting details of a lecture. Furthermore, the student needs to understand the process well enough to recognize that these clues may be implied rather than stated because some professors may not be explicit in their use of signal words, transitions, and other clues.

As a student gains understanding in the way in which relationships and level of importance are communicated in a lecture, he will improve his ability to record the information in the appropriate column. The left-hand column is the place to record main ideas, key words, ideas, people, or events. This information should be very brief. The right-hand column is the space dedicated to explanation, description, subordinate details, definitions, examples, etc. Once the student completes his notes in this fashion, he has created a valuable review tool. Using the information in the left-hand column as
prompts, he can attempt to recite the related information while not having access to viewing it. As needed, he can uncover the right-hand column to see the answer he could not supply. The review system can also be reversed by covering the left-hand column and trying to recite from memory by using the right-hand column information as prompts.

The two-column note-taking strategy helps the student to concentrate during the lecture by both giving him something to listen for and something to write down. The method has elements that appeal to auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and textual learners.

As with all learning strategies, it is important that the teacher model the strategy for his students. While presenting a typical lecture, the teacher should pause every time he uses a signal word, transition, or clue word and demonstrate what the word prompts him to do as a note-taker using the two-column method. For example, if the teacher says that Abraham Maslow’s theory of motivation has five levels of needs, he should explain that “five levels of needs” is a phrase that signals a main idea. The professor should then visually demonstrate, perhaps through a PowerPoint or simply by writing on the board, that “Maslow’s five levels of needs” goes on the left. As the instructor continues his lecture, he points out (and adds to his visual display) the words he uses to lead the student from one need to the last need. The professor’s model for the notes could look something like the following:

Course: Psychology  Chapter 2  Human Motivation  Date 11.20.09  Page 1

Topic: Abraham Maslow’s Theory of Motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T* Maslow’s 5 levels of needs</th>
<th>1. Biological</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Belongingness and love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Self-actualization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples of biological needs
water, food, oxygen, sleep

safety needs  ex.
shelter, clothing, protection

belongingness, love ex.
Friends, club membership, spouse
**estee—def.**
recognition by others of self-worth

**ex.**
All-tournament selection, a pay raise, praise

**self-actualization—def.**
need to achieve one’s fullest potential

**ex.**
Mother Teresa, Peyton Manning, Michael Jordan

**R** Major premise
Lower-level needs control a person’s actions. Must be met to some degree before the person can reach a higher need. **Ex.** Someone who is starving will be motivated to find food rather than be motivated to aim for an award.

*T—Instructor said it was a Test question
**R—repeated by the instructor

After modeling the two-column method while delivering his lecture, the professor will then ask his students to use the method when he next lectures. For the first few lectures, he may need to assist them by stressing the signal words and other cues he uses. Providing feedback is important, and it is especially important for students’ initial attempts in using the strategy. Allowing the students to see the professor’s version of two-column note-taking is an excellent way to provide feedback without requiring a lot of class time.

Because the two-column note-taking strategy is a required assignment, you should credit the student in some way for having completed it. This does not necessarily mean that you have to take up their notes each time you lecture, and you certainly do not have to grade their notes. You should take them up enough, however, to communicate to the students that their participation in the strategy is not
optional. It is your choice whether or not to assign a letter grade for it, and grading it is not particularly recommended.

You are asked to assess the assignment (with the assessment based upon the prepared rubric) a minimum of two times. You are also asked to submit a composite sheet reflecting scores to Institutional Research. The rubric will prompt you to assess each student’s skill in identifying/recording the main idea and key supporting details and also the student’s recognition of signal words and other cues to importance and relationships. The rubric will also ask you to assess the student’s skill with the learning strategy itself, that is, the ability to take effective notes using the two-column method. The rubric covers three outcomes and is divided into four skill levels: exemplary, competent, developing, and insufficient. Each skill level is defined in order to give guidance in the assessment process.
The Two-Column Method of Note-taking

I. Directions

A. Paper
   1. Use loose-leaf notebook paper and write on one side of the paper only.
   2. Divide the paper vertically into two columns by drawing lines from top to bottom.
   3. At the top of the page, write: course, chapter, date, page number (1, 2, etc.) and topic.
   4. Keep your notes in a 3-ring folder or notebook.

B. Record key words or ideas
   1. Record all key words, ideas, people, or events in the left-hand column.
   2. Keep the information in the left-hand column very brief.

C. Record descriptions or discussions
   1. For each key word or idea, record the corresponding description or explanation next to it in the right-hand column.
   2. Put space between the topics.

D. Review and clarify
   1. As soon after class as possible, review the notes in the right column and clarify any ambiguous information.
   2. Compare the information with the book and/or other students’ notes.

E. Study
   1. Cover the right side of the notes. Use the information in the left column as prompts to quiz yourself. If you can’t provide the right answer, uncover the right-hand column to see the answer again. Quiz yourself numerous times.
   2. Do the same review process by covering the left side of the notes and using the information in the right-hand column as prompts to quiz yourself.

F. Modify
   1. Add extra columns if necessary, depending on the material.
   2. For example, you may want to add an extra column for recording relevant information from your text at a later date. Or you may want to write across both columns occasionally if some information doesn’t seem to fit well into two columns.
   3. Use numbers, abbreviations, etc. to improve clarity

II. Advantages

A. Allows for easy scanning of notes to locate certain pieces of information
B. Organizes the information as you go
C. Creates an excellent active-learning review tool
D. Takes no more time than a more typical note-taking method
Course: **Learning Strategies**  
Chapter: *(3)* Note-Taking  
Date: **11.6.09**  
Page: 1

**Topic:** Two-Column Method

| Paper Requirements | Loose-leaf  
|--------------------|-------------  
|                    | One-side only  
|                    | Vertical line about 1/3 of the width of paper  
|                    | Keep notes in a 3-ring folder or notebook  

| Left-hand column | Key words  
|------------------|-------------  
|                  | Ideas  
|                  | People  
|                  | Events  
|                  | Keep it BRIEF  

| Right-hand column | Definitions  
|-------------------|-------------  
|                   | Descriptions  
|                   | Explanations  
|                   | Examples  
|                   | Use white space between the topics  

| Review/Clarify | Go over immediately after class  
|----------------|-------------------------------  
|                | Fill in anything that is missing  
|                | Clarify anything ambiguous  
|                | Compare information with text  
|                | Compare with other students’ notes |
| Study system | Cover right-hand side. Use left-column information as question prompts. If unable to provide answer, uncover right side to see the answer. 
Repeat self-test review process frequently 
Do review in reverse, too. Cover left-hand side and answer the question prompts. |
| Modify | 1. You may want to add an extra column for recording relevant information from your text at a later date. 
2. Write across both columns occasionally if some information doesn’t seem to fit well into two columns, 
3. Use numbers, abbreviations, etc. to improve clarity |