Forty years ago, Walter Pauk (1989) developed what is known as the Cornell notetaking technique to help Cornell University students better organize their notes. Today, Pauk's notetaking technique is probably the most widely used system throughout the United States.

Pauk outlines six steps in the Cornell notetaking system:

1. **Record**
2. **Reduce** (or question)
3. **Recite**
4. **Reflect**
5. **Review**
6. **Recapitulate**

**Record**

Simply record as many facts and ideas as you can in the six-inch column. Do not be concerned with getting every word down that the lecturer says or with writing your notes grammatically correctly. Learn to write telegraphic sentences or a streamlined version of the main points of the lecture by leaving out unnecessary words and using only key words. To ensure that your notes make sense weeks later, after the lecture is over, fill in blanks or make incomplete sentences complete.

**Reduce or question**

After you read through your notes, your next step is to reduce important facts and ideas to key words or phrases, or to formulate questions based on the facts and ideas. Key words, phrases, and questions are written in the narrow column left of the six-inch column. The words and phrases act as memory cues so that when you review them, you will recall the ideas or facts. The questions help to clarify the meanings of the facts and ideas.

**Recite**

Recitation is a very powerful process in the retention of information. Reciting is different from rereading in that you state out loud and in your own words the facts and ideas you are trying to learn. It is an effective way to learn because hearing your thoughts helps you to sharpen your thinking process; and stating ideas and facts in your own words challenges you to think about the meaning of the information. When reciting, cover up your notes in the six-inch column, while leaving the cue words and questions uncovered and readily accessible. Next, read each key word or question, then recite and state aloud, in your own words, the information. If your answer is correct, continue on through the lecture by reciting aloud.

**Reflect**

Reflection is pondering or thinking about the information you have learned. Reflecting is a step beyond learning note content. It reinforces deeper learning by the relating of facts and ideas to other learning and knowledge. Questions like the following enhance reflecting: How do these facts and ideas fit into what I already know? How can I apply them? How is knowing this important? What is the significance of these facts and ideas?

**Review**

The way to prevent forgetting is to review and recite your notes frequently. A good guideline to follow is to review your notes nightly or several times during the week by reciting, not rereading. Brief review sessions planned throughout the semester, perhaps weekly, will aid more complete comprehension and retention of information than will cramming the day before a test. It will cut on stress too!

**Recapitulate**

The recapitulation or summary of your notes goes at the bottom of the note page in the two-inch block column. Taking a few minutes after you have reduced, recited, and reflected to summarize the facts and ideas in your notes will help you integrate your information. The summary should not be a word-for-word rewriting of your notes. It should be in your own words and reflect the main points you want to remember from your notes. Reading through your summary(ies) in preparation for an exam is a good way to review. There are three ways to go about summarizing:

1. Summarize each page of notes at the bottom of each page.
2. Summarize the whole lecture on the last page.
3. Do both 1 and 2, in combination.
### Cornell Notetaking System Sample

#### 1. **Record** (During Lecture)
- write down facts and ideas in phrases
- use abbreviations when possible

(After Lecture)
- read through your notes
- fill in blanks and make scribbles more legible

#### 2. **Reduce or Question** (After Lecture)
- write key words, phrases or questions that serve as cues for notes taken in class
- cue phrases and questions should be in your own words

#### 3. **Recite**
with classroom notes covered, read each key word or question
recite the fact or idea brought to mind by key word or question

#### 4. & 5. **Reflect and Review**
- review your notes periodically by reciting
- think about what you have learned

#### 1. **Recapitulation** (After Lecture)
summarize each main idea
use complete sentences
Geek to Live: Take study-worthy lecture notes

by Gina Trapani

Copying class notes after the fact is a time-consuming way to study for an exam, but it was the only thing that truly worked for me back in college. But next week I'll be in a classroom again for the first time in 8 years, pen poised over notebook, and this time I'm going to perfect a strategy that gets my notes right the first time: the Cornell Note-taking method.

We've mentioned the Cornell method in passing here and there, but today we'll dive deep into how to transcribe a lecture in a way that makes studying and cross-references a breeze throughout the semester - no copying involved.

Lay out your page for the Cornell Method

Using the Cornell method, you split your notes page into three sections, as shown below.

Cues

* Main ideas
* Questions that connect points
* Diagrams
* Prompts to help you study

Notes

* Record the lecture here, using
* Concise sentences
* Shorthand symbols
* Abbreviations
* List
* Ship lots of space between points

Summary

* Top level main ideas
* For quick reference

Notes column (right) Record the lecture here during class using short
sentences and fragments that transcribe the facts you'll need. Eliminate all unnecessary words. Use bulleted lists for easy skimming, and as much shorthand as possible (without sacrificing readability.) Develop a vocabulary of abbreviations you always use, like "ex." for "for example," "v." for "very," "tho" for "though," "1st" and "2nd" for "first and second." See this useful list of common abbreviations that can help you get lecture points down as quickly as possible. Finally, leave lots of whitespace between points and paragraphs so you can go back and fill in sections later.

Cues column (left) After class, review your notes and jot questions and memory joggers in this narrow column that help connect ideas listed in the notes section. When you're studying, you will look at these cues to help you recall the salient facts in your notes, so keep that in mind when you create your cues.

Summary area (bottom) After class while you create your cues, sum up the notes on each page in one or two sentences that encapsulate the main ideas in the bottom area. You'll use the summary section to skim through your notes and find information later.

An example of a page of notes taken with the Cornell method, shamelessly ripped off from a Temple University page, is shown below. (Click to enlarge.)

Study and review your Cornell-formatted notes
The Cornell Note-taking method's creator, Walter Pauk, outlined a six-step study system to use along with this note format. The BYU web site breaks down the 6 Rs: Record, Reduce, Recite, Reflect, Review and Recapitulate. While those steps are worth a read, personally I think this system boils down even further.

In short, once you've attended class and filled in the notes area, that evening, review them and fill in the cues and summary area. When the time comes to study for an exam, read through your notes. To quiz yourself, cover up the right side and use the cues on the left to jog your memory and help you rebuild the factual narrative in your mind. When you've got a paper to write, use the summary section of each notes page to flip through and find relevant facts to cite in your paper.

In essence, with the Cornell method, instead of straight transcription, you're creating your study guide as you go instead of waiting till it's time to cram for the test.

Pre-formatted Cornell Notepaper

Unless you like messing around with a ruler and pen or pencil, there are a few templates and notepaper generators that will print out pre-formatted Cornell notes-style pages. Two mentionables include:

The Cornell Method PDF Generator creates printable PDF's split into the Cornell notepaper style with unlined, ruled, or graphed sections. Optionally include your name, the date, and the name of your class, and up to 4 punch holes for use in a binder. Also, choose the line darkness on a scale from gray to black.

Cornell Word Templates are perfect for students who take their notes with Microsoft Word. This page includes instructions for creating your own Word Cornell template, and a sample you can tweak to your own needs.

How are you taking notes this semester? Had any good or bad experiences with the Cornell method? Let us know in the comments.

Gina Trapani, the editor of Lifehacker, is sharpening her Ticonderoga Number 2's for class. Her semi-weekly feature, Geek to Live, appears every Wednesday and Friday on Lifehacker. Subscribe to the Geek to Live feed to get new installments in your newsreader.

read more:
back to school
college
feature
geek to live
memory
microsoft word
note taking
pdf
schools
students
study tips
top

comments

Adam_Toy says:

Muchas Gracias for the Cornell Word template!

Last year I began taking notes with my iBook, and have enjoyed the Notebook layout in Word 04 for Mac, but have wanted to integrate the Cornell method. Now I can!