

READING, LISTENING, AND NOTE TAKING



AGENDA

- Starter
- Know Where You're Headed and Why
- Less Is More
- Note This
- Conclusion
- Student Assessment

Objectives

Students will recognize the importance of accurate note taking while reading or listening.

Students will identify effective note taking techniques to use when reading or listening.

Students will practice effective note taking techniques.

Materials Needed

- The “Active Note Taking” activity sheet (Part I)
- An article to be read out loud (if students need more practice taking notes while listening) or one copy of an article for each student to read independently (if students need more practice taking notes while reading) (Part III)

Starter (3 minutes)

Ask students to imagine that they are going to a deserted island where millions of dollars have been buried. They must choose to bring either a shovel or a treasure map showing the location of the treasure.

Discuss which item students would choose and the reasons for their choice. Help them conclude that if they chose the shovel, they would have to dig randomly around the island, hoping to come across the treasure. However, if they chose the map, digging might be harder, but the treasure would be found.

Suggest to students that people often take notes like the person with the shovel. They take stabs at recording information, hoping that they will write down the important ideas. Explain that today's lesson will help them develop mental "maps" that will enable them to record important information accurately.

Part I Know Where You're Headed and Why (15 minutes)

Purpose: Students recognize the difference between active and passive learning and develop strategies for becoming active learners.

1. Students recognize the difference between active and passive learning.

If the class already covered effective listening skills in Lessons 2 and 3 of *Module One: Communication Skills*, ask students to explain the difference between passive listening and active listening. If not, briefly explain the following:

- Passive listening occurs when we hear without really thinking about what is being said.
- Active listening occurs when we think about what we hear, ask questions, and make connections.

Elicit from students that it is possible to listen either passively or actively while taking notes in class. Ask whether the same is true for reading as well. If responses are slow, ask students to explain the difference between mindlessly reading a textbook and becoming absorbed in an exciting story. What content are they more likely to recall?

Explain to students that the strategies they are about to learn are effective for taking notes when they are actively reading and listening.

2. Students recognize questioning as the first step to active learning.

Talk with students about why some stories are more interesting than others. Ask if they know what a page-turner is. Lead students to define “page-turner” as a story that is hard to put down. Such stories cause readers to want to discover certain answers, like who did it and what happens next.

The same can be said when we read or listen to learn information. Explain that the first step in being an active learner, whether we are listening or reading, is to ask good questions. Before students start to take notes, they should ask themselves, “What do I know about this topic? What do I want to know about this topic? How will I find out what I want to know?” These questions will allow them to predict which ideas to record and which ideas might be on a test.

3. Students learn specific questions to ask in order to actively learn.

Display the “Active Note Taking” activity sheet on the board. Ask students to suggest questions that they can ask themselves before taking notes in order to become more actively involved in the learning process. For example:

- For question one (“What do I know about this topic?”): Where have I heard about this topic before? What do I know about it? What are the most memorable ideas related to this topic?
- For question two (“What do I want to know about this topic?”): What key words or terms appeared or were said more than once? What did the teacher write on the board? What questions were posed? How were they answered? How will this be useful to me in the future?
- For question three (“How will I find out what I want to know?”): Where is the information written? Whom can I ask about it?

4. Students discuss how active learners use notes.

Explain that active learners ensure that they have all of the information that they want to know by asking themselves questions, reviewing their notes, and doing research in order to obtain information that is missing. Encourage students to develop a system for organizing their notes and to review notes after reading or listening to information.

Part II Less Is More (10 minutes)

Purpose: Students identify ways to focus on important information while note taking.

1. Students write a general description of themselves.

Tell students that once they’ve asked the important questions, they are ready to begin taking notes. Explain that the following activity will help them recognize how the answers to those questions make note taking easier and more effective.

Instruct students to spend three minutes writing descriptions of themselves. They are to write as much as they can in three minutes. Guide students to describe their physical appearance, where they live, the number of siblings they have, and so on.

2. Students take notes from written descriptions.

Divide students into pairs. Tell the pairs to trade papers and to take notes on the description as they silently read each other's work.

Allow students one minute to read and take notes. Remind them to ask themselves each question before they begin reading and to make mental notes of what they already know and what they want to learn.

Ask students to compare their notes with the written description. Elicit from students the differences between their notes and the written description.

3. Students identify abbreviations to use during note taking.

Ask students how they might ensure that they write everything they need to remember without taking the time to write exactly what they read or hear. Elicit from students that abbreviations and shorthand are effective strategies to use when taking notes. Have students brainstorm abbreviations and shorthand. Ask them to identify different symbols and abbreviations that are commonly used. Offer suggestions such as the following: "lbs." for "pounds," "St." for "street," "b/c" for "because," "10 yrs." for "10 years," etc.

4. Students repeat the exercise.

Ask students to find a different partner. Tell students to trade their papers and to take notes again. Remind them that they have one minute to write the most comprehensive notes they possibly can.

Ask students to again compare their notes with the written description. Elicit from students the differences between their notes and the written description.

5. Students recognize that the second set of notes is more effective.

With the class, compare and contrast the two activities. Ask:

- Which of the two assignments was easier? Why?
- Did you need the same amount of time to get as much information as possible? Why?
- Which set of notes is more concise? Why?

Tell students that when taking notes, less is more. Speculate why this might be true. Lead students to recognize that it is best to write down only important information and to be as brief as possible. The questions they ask themselves before they begin taking notes will help them to determine which information is important.

6. Students recognize strategies for identifying important information.

Refer again to the activity sheet and direct students' attention to "Focus on the important details." Ask students to suggest ways to identify the important information in a book they are reading. (Students might respond: chapter titles, bold or italicized words, concepts that relate to material already covered in class.)

Ask students to suggest ways to identify important information when listening. Remind students about nonverbal communication and refer to part II of "Lesson 2: Listening" of *Module One: Communication Skills*, which focused on picking up verbal and nonverbal signals in order to listen effectively.

Explain that people often use their tone of voice and facial expressions to stress important ideas.

Part III Note This (20 minutes)

Purpose: Students practice note taking techniques and skills.

1. Students summarize specific note taking techniques.

Ask students to describe the ways in which note taking differs from writing. Write students' responses on the board. (Students might respond: notes are shorter, complete sentences are not necessary, grammar and spelling are not important, symbols and other abbreviations are used.)

2. Students practice effective note taking.

Invite students to practice effective note taking. Depending on student's strengths, either read an article out loud or distribute copies of reading material from which students will take notes. If students are reading, allow them 10 minutes to read and take notes.

3. Students compare notes with partners.

When students have finished taking notes, ask them to each select a partner with whom they will compare their written notes. Have them discuss why certain points were included or omitted. Encourage them to offer constructive suggestions to each other about their note taking techniques.

Conclusion (2 minutes)

Ask students to describe an active learner. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Active learning is more effective than passive learning.
- Asking questions is the first step to effective note taking.
- The questions that students ask will help them determine which information is important.

Student Assessment

1. As an active learner, what questions can you ask yourself to help you get focused?
2. How do you choose which information to take notes on?
3. In what ways are the strategies for taking effective notes on a book and taking notes on a lecture similar? How are they different?

LESSON EXTENSIONS

Using Quotations

“Indiscriminate study bloats the mind.”

Have students draw a diagram representing their minds, indicating what they study and what they would like to focus on most. Have them explain how this relates to the quote.

Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

Have students examine the way their favorite websites are constructed. Have them use index cards to show the sites' layouts (i.e., how details are subsumed under main ideas).

Have each student construct an outline of their favorite site from their index cards (headings only) and write a justification for the choice.

Writing in Your Journal

Have students write a paragraph evaluating their skills as note takers. (See *How to Improve Your Study Skills* by Marcia J. Coman and Kathy L. Heavers.) Have them set a specific goal for improvement.

Have students share their goals with a classmate. If possible, pair good note takers with those whose skills need improvement.

Using Technology

Have groups use a search engine of their choice to research a topic. Have them carefully word their questions so their search is as focused as possible.

Have the groups present the sites that provide the best answers to their questions—as well as a few that are off topic—and explain how narrowing their question helped them focus their search. Emphasize to students that just as their searches must be concise, so must their note taking be concise and focused to be effective.

Homework

Have students discover who, besides students, takes notes. Tell students to observe restaurant and store employees. They should also ask people they know if they take notes on the job.

As a class, create a list of people who take notes on the job. Discuss student reactions to the need for notes after finishing school.

Additional Resources

Review *How to Improve Your Study Skills* by Marcia J. Coman and Kathy L. Heavers as a class. Assign groups one of the following topics from the book: outlining, signal words, patterning, highlighting, margin notes, and streamlining. Have each group read its assigned section and prepare a presentation.

After their presentation, groups should read a passage out loud that offers students a chance to practice the skill covered.

ACTIVE NOTE TAKING

1. What do I know about this topic?

2. What do I want to know about this topic?

3. How will I find out what I want to know?

4. Focus on the important details.
