



Literacy at Hartford Public High School

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Note Taking

from Classroom Instruction that Works
by Robert Marzano, et al.

Note taking is closely related to summarizing. To take effective notes, a student must make a determination as to what is most important, and then state that information in a brief form. This is the heart of summarizing.

Research supports several generalizations that can be used to guide instruction on note taking.

1. **Verbatim note taking is, perhaps, the least effective way to take notes.** A fair amount of research supports the intuitive perception that verbatim note taking is not an effective strategy. It is probably true that when students are trying to record everything they hear or read, they are not engaged in the act of synthesizing information. Trying to record all of what is heard or read takes up some much of a student's working memory that she does not have room to analyze the incoming information.
2. **Notes should be considered a work in progress.** Once students initially take notes, teachers should encourage them to continually add to the notes and revise them as their understanding of content deepens and sharpens. This implies that teachers should systematically provide time for students to go back over their notes—reviewing and revising them. The review-and-revision process can be a particularly powerful activity if encouraged and directed by the teacher. Specifically, the teacher might help students identify and correct misconceptions in notes they have previously taken.
3. **Notes should be used as study guides for tests.** One of the more practical uses of

notes is as test preparation tools. If notes have been well designed and students have systematically elaborated on them, they can provide a powerful form of review for students. Interestingly, fewer students than might be expected take advantage of notes to this end. This might be because they are simply unaware of this potentially powerful use of notes, or they do not know how to structure their time to adequately prepare for tests using their notes.

4. **The more notes that are taken, the better.** One of the common misconceptions about note taking is that “less is more.” That is, sometimes students are advised to keep their notes very short. Indeed, researchers have explained that in their examination of study guides prepared by universities to teach students how to take notes, “Five out of ten articles examined emphasized the importance of keeping notes ‘brief’ and not putting too much material in notes.” Yet, in their study of the effects of note taking, these researchers found that there was a strong relationship between the amount of information taken in notes and students' achievement on examinations.

Teacher-Prepared Notes

Teacher-prepared notes are one of the most straightforward uses of notes. The teacher outlines the material that will be covered in a unit of study. These notes provide students with a clear picture of what the teacher considers important. In addition, they provide students with a model of how notes might be taken. The format for these notes is left to the discretion of the teacher. Remember: students should be encouraged to eventually create their own notes based on the format that the teacher chooses to employ. Be clear; be organized; be consistent.